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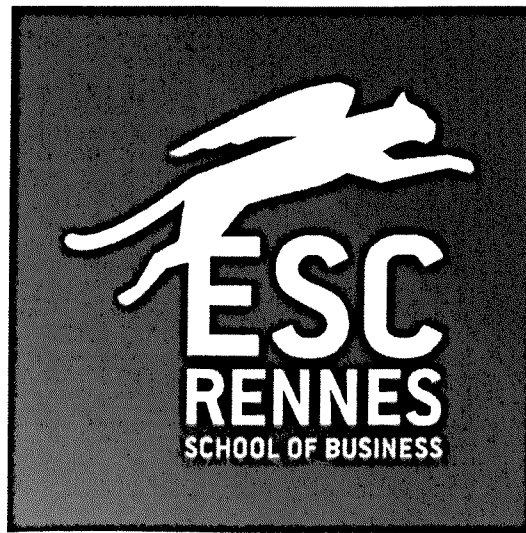
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**HR practices, commitment, job performance and
early retirement among older employees with an on
average low occupational status**



Sophie Hennekam, MSc in diversity management

Thesis in Human Resource Management for a Doctor of Philosophy degree

Year of resubmission: 2014

The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

ESC Rennes School of Business, Rennes, France

Statement

The material offered has partially been submitted for a PhD degree in May 2012. This thesis is a re-submission after major amendments and has been completely rewritten.

An article written with Olivier Herrbach has been published in a special issue of Employee Relations in summer 2013. This article “HRM practices and low status older employees” is based on the outcomes of this thesis. A second article “HRM practices and low status older workers” is currently under review at “Personnel Review”.

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List of figures, graphs and tables

Figure 3.1	Model of Herrbach at al. (2009)	96
Figure 3.2	Model of the quantitative study of this thesis	97
Figure 5.1	Model of the qualitative study to be tested in the quantitative study	201
Figure 6.1	Model of the quantitative study of this thesis	202
Figure 6.2	Outcomes of the quantitative study of this thesis	221
Graph 2.1	Average pensionable age and life expectancy at OECD countries.	29
Graph 2.2	Average age employed labour force and net labour participation rate in the 50 to 65-year-old population in the Netherlands.	30
Graph 2.3	Number of retired employees and average age of retirement in the Netherlands.	31
Graph 2.4	Retirement age employees in the Netherlands.	31
Graph 2.5	Hofstede's scores for the Netherlands on the four cultural dimensions.	35
Graph 2.6	Percentage of younger and older trade union members in the Netherlands.	42
Graph 2.7	Trade unions and labour force by age group in the Netherlands, 2011.	43
Graph 6.1	Scree plot of the whole survey	213
Graph 6.2	Scree plot perceived quality of perceived HR practices	214
Table 2.1	People working the creative industry in the Netherlands in 2006-2008 in numbers and percentages.	39

Table 2.2	People working in the creative industry, broken down by gender, age and origin in 2006-2008 in percentages.	40
Table 2.3	Organizations in the creative industry per sector in 2009 in number and percentages.	41
Table 2.4	Characteristics of size of organizations in the creative industry in the Netherlands in percentages.	41
Table 2.5	Percentages per sector in the trade union versus in this study.	43
Table 2.6	All occupations, ranks and percentages of participants for each occupation	46
Table 2.7	Rang of the occupations according to ISCO-08 in the present study in percentages.	48
Table 2.8	Rang of the occupations according to ISCO-08 in the qualitative study in percentages.	49
Table 3.1	Overlap research issues and hypotheses	67
Table 3.2	Factors influencing job performance	78
Table 3.3	Factors influencing commitment	83
Table 3.4	Factors influencing the retirement decision as found in previous Research	93
Table 3.5	Items of several HR practices compared to Herrbach's study	93
Table 4.1	Characteristics qualitative study in comparison with the quantitative study and population as a whole	114
Table 4.2	Scales and number of items in the survey	130
Table 4.3	Original questions as used in previous studies versus the questions as formulated in this study.	131
Table 4.4	Measurement scales	133
Table 4.5	Translation scales	134
Table 4.6	Types of response bias and the way they dealt with	137

Table 5.1	Overview main themes identified in the qualitative study.	141
Table 5.2	Rang of the occupations according to ISCO-08 in the qualitative study	197
Table 5.3	Interviewees in the two occupational groups	198
Table 6.1	Outliers	204
Table 6.2	Demographic information clean sample quantitative study 414 participants	204
Table 6.3	Descriptive statistics before correction	205
Table 6.4	Descriptive statistics after correction	206
Table 6.5	Descriptive statistics	206
Table 6.6	Results Shapiro-Wilk test	207
Table 6.7	Statistics of skewness and kurtosis	208
Table 6.8	Results Levene's test	208
Table 6.9	Correlation matrix of all the predictor variables	209
Table 6.10	Collinearity statistics	210
Table 6.11	Results Durbin-Watson test	211
Table 6.12	Cronbach's alphas	212
Table 6.13	KMO statistics and Bartlett's test for the whole survey	212
Table 6.14	KMO statistixs and Barlett's test for perceived quality of HR practices scale	214 200
Table 6.15	Descriptive statistics preference for early retirement	218
Table 6.16	One-sample t-test for preference for early retirement, 99% confidence interval	218
Table 6.17	Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable preference for early retirement. Standardized coefficients.	219
Table 6.18	Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable job performance. Standardized coefficients.	219

Table 6.19	Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable affective organizational commitment. Standardized coefficients.	220
Table 6.20	Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable preference for continuance organizational commitment. Standardized coefficients.	220
Table 6.21	Overview with hypotheses with their outcome.	221
Table 7.1	Overview theoretical and empirical contributions	225
Table 7.2	Extent to which previous research has studied the themes Investigated in the present study.	226

Table of contents

Title page	1
Statement	2
Acknowledgements	3
List of figures, graphs and tables	4
Table of contents	8
1 Introduction	18
1.1 Background	18
1.2 Aims and objectives	19
1.3 Justification for the research	22
1.4 Research problem, propositions / research issues and contributions	23
1.5 Methodology	24
1.6 Outline of the thesis	25
1.7 Conclusion	26
2 Context	27
2.1 The ageing population	27
2.2 The ageing population in the Netherlands	29
2.3 The Dutch pension system	31
2.4 The Dutch culture	34
2.5 The creative industry in the Netherlands	37
2.5.1. Clusters of occupations within the creative industry in the Netherlands	38
2.5.2 Characteristics of the occupations in the creative industry in the	39

Netherland	
2.5.3. Characteristics of the organizations in the creative industry in the Netherlands	40
2.6 Trade union membership	41
2.7 Occupational status	44
2.8 The age of employees	50
2.9 Conclusion	52
3 Literature review: theory and research issues	54
3.1 Theoretical approaches	54
3.1.1 The social identity theory	54
3.1.2 The socio-emotional selectivity theory	55
3.1.3 The continuity theory	56
3.1.4 The human capital theory	56
3.1.5 Theoretical framework: the social exchange theory	57
3.1.6 Application of theoretical framework	61
3.2 Research gaps and contributions	63
3.3 Research issues and hypotheses	66
3.4 Research issue 1	67
3.5. Research issue 2 and hypothesis 1	68
3.5.1 Flexible work options	68
3.5.2. Job design	69
3.5.3 Training	71
3.5.4 Performance evaluation	75
3.5.5 Recognition and respect	76
3.6 Research issue 4 and hypothesis 2	77
3.7 Research issue 3 and hypotheses 3a and 3b	79

3.7.1. Flexible work options	84
3.7.2. Job design	85
3.7.3 Training	86
3.7.4 Performance evaluation	87
3.7.5 Recognition and respect	88
3.8 Other variables	88
3.9 Research issue 5	89
3.10 Model	93
3.11 Summary	97
 4 Methodology	 98
4.1 Methodological approaches	98
4.1.1 Epistemology	98
4.1.2 Ontology	100
4.1.3 Axiology and reflexivity	102
4.1.4 Link paradigms-epistemological and ontological positions and research methods	104
4.1.5 The evolution of thinking about mixed methods	105
4.1.6 Advantages and disadvantages of mono-methods	105
4.1.7 Why use mixed methods	106
4.1.8 Approaches to mixed methods	107
4.1.9 The order of mixed methods	108
4.1.10 Qualitative interviews	109
4.1.11 Quantitative survey	109
4.2. Qualitative procedures	110
4.2.1. Instruments	111
4.2.2. Sampling	114

4.2.3. Design	118
4.2.4. Analysis of the data	119
4.2.5. Validity	122
4.2.6. Reliability	123
4.2.7. Inter-coder reliability	124
4.2.8. Trustworthiness and authenticity	125
4.2.9. Generalizability	126
4.2.10. Ethical considerations	128
4.2.11. Limitations	130
4.3. Quantitative procedures	131
4.3.1. Form of survey	130
4.3.2. Instruments	131
4.3.3. Likert scales	134
4.3.4. Translation	134
4.3.5. Pre-test	135
4.3.6. Procedures	136
4.3.7. Profile participants	136
4.3.8. Response rate	137
4.3.9. Response bias	138
5 Findings qualitative study	141
5.1. Research issue 1	144
5.1.1 Older employees are too expensive	144
5.1.2 Organizational roles for older employees	145
5.1.3 Tacit knowledge and knowledge sharing	146
5.1.4 Fear of not being able to keep up with the current developments	147
5.1.5 Declining ambition	148

5.1.6	Having to prove oneself	149
5.1.7	Resignation	149
5.1.8	Perception of changes in the industry	150
5.1.9	Hectic working environment	150
5.1.10	Declining creativity in the creative industry	150
5.1.11	Increasing workload	151
5.1.12	Ambiance at work	152
5.1.13	Working over-hours	153
5.1.14	Perceived age discrimination	153
5.1.15	Hiring procedures	153
5.1.16	Age discrimination at the workplace	154
5.1.17	Positive age discrimination	155
5.1.18	Stereotypes of older employees	156
5.1.19	Theory-reality paradox	156
5.2.	Research issue 2	157
5.2.1	The existence/absence of a special policy for older employees	158
5.2.2	(Dis)satisfaction with HR practices	158
5.2.3	Flexible work options	160
5.2.4	Shifts	160
5.2.5	Flexible working hours	160
5.2.6	Working from home	161
5.2.7	Working part time	162
5.2.8	Job design	162
5.2.9	Job transfer	162
5.2.10	Internal job change	163
5.2.11	Challenging assignments/special projects	164
5.2.12	Ergonomic adaptations	165

5.2.13 Training	165
5.2.14 Training opportunities	165
5.2.15 Equal opportunities regarding training for older and younger employees	166
5.2.16 Focus of the training	167
5.2.17 Promotion	168
5.2.18 Evaluation of performance	169
5.2.19 Performance appraisal	169
5.2.20 Feedback	170
5.2.21 Terms and conditions of employment	171
5.2.22 Salary	171
5.2.23 Secondary terms of employment	172
5.2.24 Recognition and respect	172
5.2.25 The importance of recognition and respect	173
5.2.26 Recognition for the knowledge and experience of older employees	173
5.3 Research issue 3	174
5.3.1. Commitment towards the occupation	175
5.3.2. Affective commitment towards the organization	176
5.3.3. Continuance commitment	177
5.3.4. Change in commitment	178
5.3.5. Factors influencing organizational commitment	179
5.4. Research issue 4	180
5.5. Research issue 5	181
5.5.1. Retirement age	181
5.5.2. Factors influencing the retirement decision	181
5.5.3. Financial consideration	182
5.5.4. Desire to keep a certain standard of living	182
5.5.5. Necessity	183

5.5.6. Health	184
5.5.7. Psychological factors	184
5.5.8. Being used at the idea to retire at a certain age	184
5.5.9. Contribution made	185
5.5.10 Personal development factors	185
5.5.11 Sense of accomplishment	185
5.5.12 Having something to do	186
5.5.13 Staying sharp and up-to-date	186
5.5.14 Be part of society and have a meaningful job	187
5.5.15 Social factors	188
5.5.16 Contact with colleagues and clients	188
5.5.17 Partners	188
5.5.18 Pleasure	189
5.5.19 Good ambiance	189
5.5.20 Enjoys current situation	190
5.5.21 Organizational factors	190
5.5.22 Recognition and respect	191
5.5.23 Jobs with fewer responsibilities	192
5.5.24 Voluntary character of retirement decision	194
5.5.25 Flexibility	194
5.5.26 Doing something completely different	195
5.5.27 Desire for a focus on experience instead of age	196
5.5.28 Communication	197
5.5.29 Growth possibilities	198
5.6. Comparison low versus high occupational group	198
5.7. Summary of the results	200
5.8. Framework based on qualitative study to be tested quantitatively	201

5.9. Conclusion	202
6. Results quantitative study	203
6.1 Cleaning of the data	204
6.1.1 Missing values	205
6.1.2 Outliers	205
6.1.3 Descriptive statistics after cleaning the data	205
6.2 Assumptions parametric tests	208
6.2.1. Normally distributed data	208
6.2.2. Homogeneity of variance	209
6.2.3. Interval data	210
6.2.4. Independence	210
6.3. Assumptions generalizability	210
6.4. Reliability	212
6.5.1. Factor analysis	213
6.5.2. Factor analysis of the perceived quality of HR practices scale	214
6.6. Statistical analysis	216
6.7. No control group	217
6.8. Use of SPSS	219
6.9. Preference for early retirement	219
6.10. Multiple regression analysis	219
6.11. Conclusion	222
7 Discussion & Conclusion	224
7.1.1 Problem statement	224
7.1.2 Overview of the methodology	224
7.1.3 Contributions and advances to existing body of knowledge	225

7.1.4	Summary of the results	227
7.2	Discussion of the results	228
7.2.1	Research issue 1	228
7.2.2	Research issue 2 and hypothesis 1	230
7.2.3	Research issue 4 and hypothesis 2	231
7.2.4	Research issue 3 and hypotheses 3a and 3b	232
7.2.5	Research issue 5	232
7.3	Explanations for the obtained findings	233
7.3.1	Effect of the way constructs were used: social exchange theory	234
7.3.2	Effect of the way constructs were used: job performance	234
7.3.3	Effect of the way constructs were used: continuance commitment	234
7.3.4	Effect of the way constructs were used: employee's perspective	235
7.3.5	Effect of the way constructs were used: perceived versus actual HR practices	235
7.4.1	Effect of the sample: occupational status	236
7.4.2	Effect of the sample: social identity theory	238
7.4.3	Effect of the sample: perceived organizational justice	239
7.4.4	Effect of the sample: work centrality	240
7.4.5	Effect of the sample: continuance theory	240
7.4.6	Effect of the sample: socio-emotional selectivity theory	241
7.4.7	Effect of the sample: HR practices perceived as a form of favoritism	241
7.5.1.	Effect of the context: perceived organizational support	242
7.5.2	Effect of the context: perceived HR strength	243
7.5.3	Effect of the context: psychological contract violation	243
7.5.4	Effect of the context: national culture	244
7.6	Limitations	244
7.7	Implications for theory	246

7.8	Implications for methodology	249
7.9	Suggestions for future research	251
7.10	Conclusion	251
Appendix 1	Bibliography	253
Appendix 2	Survey used for the quantitative study	282
Appendix 3	Interview-guide semi-structured interviews	286
Appendix 4	Frequency counting qualitative study	288
Appendix 5	Old survey used in pre-test	290
Appendix 6	Missing data	294
Appendix 7	Histograms to determine normality of data	295
Appendix 8	Histograms to determine normality of errors	297
Appendix 9	Scatterplots to determine linearity	299
Appendix 10	Codebook qualitative study	301
Appendix 11	Example of hermeneutics	302
Appendix 12	Cronbach's alphas	304

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1. Background

The ageing population presents several challenges to organizations. Life expectancy is increasing, people are studying for an increasing number of years before entering the workforce and the working population declines compared to the population being in retirement. As a result, family structures are changing as well as social insurance systems and patterns of work and retirement (OECD, 2003; 2005; 2006; 2011).

In Europe and North America many countries are facing demographic changes that imply that older workers will become an increasingly substantial part of the workforce in the near future. According to the United Nation, by 2030 about 1 billion people will be 65 or older, compared to almost 500 million in 2006. Similarly the European Commission forecasts that by 2030, the European Union will face a labour shortage of some 20.8 million people (6.8%) of working age (OECD, 2011) and while Europe currently has four people of working age for every older person, it will have only two workers per older person by 2050 (OECD, 2011). Furthermore, in some countries the share of gross domestic product devoted to social insurance for older people is expected to more than double in upcoming years, decreasing the economic growth (OECD, 2011). All these trends will affect the workplace. One solution to this upcoming challenge is to try to keep older employees in the workforce beyond the legal retirement age or increase the legal retirement age.

Taking into account the demographic and socio-economic trends stated above, organizations will need to know more about older employees in the workplace in order to retain and fully utilize them. For professionals that work in Human Resource departments in organizations, the identification of factors related to the employability of older employees can help to manage the challenges presented. Older employees have been defined by different age thresholds and no agreement on a chronological threshold exists (Lazarra & Bombelli, 2011). Some researchers argue to put the threshold at 50 (OECD, 2011), stating that career development and work attitudes after the age of 50 are quite different from those at earlier ages (Simpson, Greller & Stroh, 2002), others at 40 or 45, referring to obsolete knowledge, skills and attitudes (Muijnck & Zwinkels, 2002; War, 2001). This thesis defines older employees aged 45 years or older, because age discrimination is an issue in rapidly changing industries like the creative industry in the Netherlands from the age of 45 onwards (Braams & Urlings, 2010).

Although many employers are aware of the challenges related to the ageing workforce, few have developed an action plan (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Arnone, 2006; Parker, 2006). One tool Human Resource departments can use in order to try to keep older employees longer in the workforce is Human Resource practices. It has been argued that the ageing population asks for new Human Resource management policies and practices that fit older workers (Collins, 2003). The provision of HR practices designed for older employees is a sign of an organization that it supports its employees and is committed to them (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003; Gould-Williams, 2007), which might result in several favourable behaviours on the side of the employees that can be beneficial for an organization, like extending one's working life, expressing greater affective commitment or performing better.

This thesis looks at how the perception of the quality of HR practices influences affective and continuance commitment, job performance and preference for early retirement among older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands.

The creative industry in the Netherlands was chosen, because it is an industry that is changing rapidly, due to technological developments. A trend that many older employees are leaving this industry has become visible (Braams & Urlings, 2010) and as such it was considered an appropriate industry to study how the perception of the quality of HR practices for older employees would relate to their preference for early retirement, their commitment and job performance. Employees with an average lower occupational status were chosen, since this group of employees has received only limited attention from researchers (Pillay, Kelly & Tones, 2006; 2010) and their perception of the quality of HR practices is likely to differ from that of employees with an on average higher occupational status (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2011; Herrbach, Mignonac, Vandenberghe & Negrini, 2009). These factors will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two about the context in which this thesis took place.

1.2. Aims and objectives

This thesis will describe the two phases of this study, first an exploratory qualitative study using semi-structured interviews by telephone and afterwards a quantitative study using surveys. The qualitative study aims at getting more insights about how older employees experience the world of work today, what issues they face, what their needs and wishes are, which HR practices they get offered, how they describe

their affective and continuance commitment, job performance and which factors influence their retirement decision. The quantitative study then examines the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices on the one hand and job performance, affective and continuance commitment and the preference for early retirement on the other hand.

In the light of the ageing population, it is important to know what factors influence someone's preference for early retirement. Although Zappala, Depolo, Fraccaroli, Guglielmi and Sarchielli (2008) have examined the relationship between several demographic factors and the preference for early retirement in Italy, this study looks at the perception of the quality of HR practices, since this is something that organizations could and do offer. The perception of the quality of HR practices refers to how one perceives the provision of HR practices (positive-negative continuum). The answers range from very bad, moderate, neutral, sufficient to very good. The HR practices under study are flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation and recognition/respect. Respondents are asked to rate the quality of the possibilities and facilities within the organization where they work.

Secondly, the perception of the quality of HR practices possibly influences other behaviors and attitudes. One of them is commitment to the organization. This study defines organizational commitment as a psychological stabilizing or obliging force that binds an individual to courses of action relevant to the target of that force (Bentein et al., 2005; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). This study looks at affective and continuance organizational commitment. Affective organizational commitment is defined as employees' attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991), while continuance organizational commitment is defined as commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving an organization. Normative organizational commitment has not been studied in this thesis, since it has been argued that affective and continuance commitment are more important to older employees (Herrbach et al., 2009). A more extensive discussion on affective and continuance organizational commitment can be found on page 78. Commitment has been studied extensively, because of its association with desirable outcomes, such as reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover, and improved job performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999; Jaramillo et al., 2005). Job performance being one of the possible desirable outcomes which employees can express if they have a positive perception of their organization, it was included in the present study. Job performance refers to how

well each employee performed the duties of his/her job (Ibrahim, Al Sejini & Al Qassimi, 2004) and the answers range from far below expectations, below expectations, as expected, above expectations to far above expectations. Job performance is measured using a meta-perspective, asking respondents how they think their supervisors and colleagues would rate their performance. This is explained in more detail on p. 132. Adopting a social exchange perspective, perceived quality of HR practices can be seen as ‘signals’ and are interpreted as such by individual employees (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2011). A positive perception of the quality of HR practices can be seen as a signal that the organization wants to continue the exchange relationship with them (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003) that they can reciprocate by performing better.

Furthermore, the results of this study provide insights into the factors that influence the preference for early retirement of older employees in the creative industry in the Netherlands and investigate the impact of occupational status level. This study focuses on a group of workers with a relatively low level of education, most of them being classified as skilled and semi-skilled, in contrast with most existing research that has focused on managers (Herrbach et al, 2009; Kooij et al., 2009).

Moreover, this study looks at a preference for early retirement, as opposed to retirement intention or actual retirement which has been the focus of previous studies. The preference for early retirement has been defined as a preference for a withdrawal from an organizational position or career path of considerable duration, before the official retirement age, with the intention of reduced psychological commitment to work (Feldman, 1994). Several studies have examined the intention to retire (Elovainio, Forma, Kivima, Sutinen & Laine, 2005; Potocnik, Tordera & Peirò, 2009; Schmidt & Lee, 2008) but without clearly differentiating among the various types of retirement intention. Indeed, one of the main criticisms made of studies on retirement intentions is that they have only considered the extremes of the “work/retirement” continuum (Taylor & Doverspike, 2003). Retirement intention has not been chosen here, since a preference for early retirement has shown to be linked in similar ways to other constructs (Zappala et al., 2008), gives additional information about the preferred retirement age and realistic retirement age and exists of fewer items than measuring the retirement intention. Actual retirement can be measured by the age older employees finally retire, but since this asks for a longitudinal study, this was not feasible in this study.

1.3. Justification for the research

Europe has reacted to the ageing population with the implementation of new policies. More specifically, the Lisbon European Council of 2000 and the Stockholm European Council of 2001 came with policies to increase the employment rate of older people. The Lisbon Strategy encouraged organizations to address a whole range of issues of inequality in the labour market and the Treaty of Amsterdam extended the scope of anti-discrimination legislation by including age. Each European country has implemented anti-discrimination laws in response to the European Employment Directive on Equal Treatment of 2000. In the Netherlands, the principle of equal treatment was introduced into the Dutch Constitution in 1983 (Dierx & Rodrigues, 2003). According to Article 1 of the Constitution, all persons in the Netherlands should be treated equally in equal circumstances, and distinctions on grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race, sex, or any other grounds, are prohibited. The principle of equality in the Netherlands was not protected by special civil anti-discrimination law until 1994. Before that time, special civil law only protected discrimination on the grounds of sex. The ETA (Equal Treatment Act) was enacted after ten years of public and political debate. Its enactment required strong support from several political parties. These parties were convinced by the interpretation of international law that required the transposition of international treaty obligations into national law. In 2000, the Council of the European Union adopted a new Directive that banned discrimination in various fields, including social security and social benefits. As a consequence, these criteria are explicitly included in Dutch law and broadened the level of protection (Dierx & Rodrigues, 2003).

Looking at the ageing population and measures currently taken by governments to increase the legal retirement age, more research about older employees in the workplace is needed in order to know how to keep them working till or past the legal retirement age (Kooij et al, 2009). However, little scientific research has been conducted in this area in the Netherlands (Van Dalen, Henkens & Schippers, 2009). This thesis contributes to the existing body of knowledge by looking at the perception of the quality of HR practices and its influence on commitment, job performance and the preference for early retirement among older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands by using the principles underlying social exchange theory.

1.4. Research problem, propositions / research issues and contributions

The problem addressed in this research is:

The influence of perceived quality of HR practices on affective and continuance organizational commitment, job performance and the preference for early retirement among older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands by using the principles underlying social exchange theory.

The theory adopted to study the research problem stated above is the social exchange theory. According to social exchange theory, individuals engage in interactions with others because they are motivated by the expectations of receiving inducements in return from the other party (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). This has been called the norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). This theory argues that employees form general perceptions about the intentions and attitudes of the organization toward them in the form of policies and practices, which leads them to create a relationship with their employer that is parallel to the relationships individuals build with each other. Each party acts according to the norm that the other party will reciprocate their actions, creating mutual obligations over time. If one party does not reciprocate, an imbalance is created between the contributions of the two parties (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which can be restored by behaving in an unfavorable way. Although social exchange theory has often been applied in the context of the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986), its application to older employees and especially older employees with a low occupational status has received only limited attention from researchers. The social exchange theory was chosen as theoretical framework for this thesis, because the provision of HR practices can be seen as a signal that the organization wants to extend their relationship with them. This theory states that employees can react to this by expressing behaviors that are positive for the organization, like stronger affective commitment, better job performance or a preference to retire at a later age. On page 92-95 it is explained how this study is based on a previous study by Herrbach et al., (2009). This theory will be explained in more detail in chapter three: the literature review.

This thesis explores a number of research issues and hypotheses on the relationship between older employees' perceptions of the quality of HR practices, affective and continuance organizational commitment, job performance and the preference for early retirement. By testing the hypotheses and answering the research

issues, this study provides some contributions that will be presented in chapter 7: the discussion and conclusion. In summary, this research made several contributions. Firstly, it was found that although previous studies on older managers found that organizations can influence the retirement decision by the provision of certain HR practices (Herrbach et al., 2009), the present study found that for older employees with an average low occupational status the perception of the quality of HR practices does not influence the preference for early retirement. Secondly, the perception of the quality of HR practices related to flexible work options, job design and recognition and respect have a weak relationship with commitment and job performance. Thirdly, it was found that personal factors are more important in the decision to retire, compared to organizational factors. On the organizational level, "flexibility", "communication" and "a change in mentality that is more welcoming to older employees" have been identified as core concepts if organizations want to extend the working lives of older employees. Lastly, from the results of this thesis, the social exchange theory does not seem to apply in the same way to older employees with an average low occupational status. It was found that the social identity theory can better explain the findings.

1.5. Methodology

The methodology of this thesis can be divided into two parts: one qualitative part and one quantitative part. This study uses thus a mixed methods approach, in which both quantitative and qualitative elements are used in one research project. First the qualitative study was conducted to identify themes followed by a statistical analysis of the quantitative data. For both studies, employees aged 45 or older, working in the creative industry in the Netherlands and member of trade union FNV-KIEM were used. FNV-KIEM is the only trade union for the creative industry in the Netherlands and has over 34 000 members. This trade union was interested in the study and has given access to its member database. The database of this trade union was used to contact potential participants. More information about the trade union will be provided in the next chapter on the context.

The qualitative study consisted of thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews by telephone. The interviews were recorded, transcribed by hand and analyzed without the use of a software package. This study aimed to get more insights about how they experience the world of work today, their issues, problems, needs and wishes, their perception of the policy for older employees at their organization, their

commitment, job performance and the factors influencing the retirement decision. Based on the outcomes of this exploratory qualitative study, a survey was designed that was used in the second phase.

Afterwards, a second study quantitative in nature was conducted, targeting employees from the same database of the trade union FNV-KIEM. Paper surveys were sent out with a return-envelope provided. The data were entered in the statistical software program SPSS by the researcher and multiple regression was used to analyze the data.

Based on the unexpected findings of the quantitative study, the researcher conducted another round of analysis of the qualitative data. This analysis aimed at finding explanations for the unexpected findings and used hermeneutics.

Finally, the results of both studies were compared and integrated, using triangulation.

1.6. Outline of the thesis

This thesis is structured by the use of several chapters that each address the important issues in a logical order.

This first chapter introduces the research problem, justifies the study, presents the contributions and briefly describes the methodology.

The second chapter presents the context of the study and gives background information in order to understand the specificity of the context.

The third chapter discusses the theoretical framework used in this thesis. Other theories that will be used in the discussion chapter to explain the findings are presented. Then, the theory of choice is explained in general terms and applied to the present study. The literature is critically reviewed and research issues are identified and presented in the form of hypotheses for the quantitative part of this study and in the form of research issues for the qualitative part of this study.

The fourth chapter gives an overview of the methodology and is divided in three parts. The chapter starts with a discussion on epistemological and ontological positions and its relation to research methods is explained. Mixed methods research is explained and the different approaches are outlined and justified. In the second part it explains the methods used in the qualitative part of this thesis. The procedures, strategy, instruments, processes of analysis and interpretation will be discussed and justified. Related issues like reliability, validity and generalizability will also be presented as well as some ethical considerations and the limitations of the

methodology. The third part of the chapter continues by explaining and justifying the methods used in carrying out the quantitative study. It will discuss and justify the research context, the design, the pre-test, the instruments, the procedures and the limitations. Moreover, it will present an overview of the profiles of the participants.

Chapter five gives the main findings of the qualitative study of this thesis. The focus is on the identified patterns in the data. The chapter is structured by research issue. Each research issue is explained and broken down by subthemes. Quotations are provided to support the explanations provided. To give a brief overview of all the data, one matrix with all themes and subthemes is provided right at the beginning of this chapter. The main findings are summarized at the end.

Chapter six presents and analyzes the results of the quantitative data. It starts with a discussion on how was dealt with methodological issues regarding the pre-analysis of the data and then shows the results. The chapter is organized by outcome variable and tables are presented.

Chapter seven contains a detailed discussion about both the quantitative and qualitative study and presents a conclusion. This chapter will be devoted to the explanations of the obtained results. The results will be linked to previous research and critically examined. Here the results of the qualitative and quantitative study will be integrated. The chapter is structured by research issue and hypothesis, like chapter three and five. The theoretical and methodological contribution of the research will be outlined in detail and conclusions about the research problem will be drawn. Moreover, the limitations will be discussed and finally, directions for future research are presented.

1.7. Conclusion

This first chapter of the thesis presented the background of the study, specified and justified the research problem, described its significance and contributions, and presented a brief overview of the methodology used. It further gave an outline of the structure of the thesis. On this basis, a detailed description of the research context can now be provided.

Chapter 2: Context

This chapter will give an overview of the context in which this study took place in order to fully understand the scale and nature of the study and to better understand how this influences the attitudes and perceptions of older employees and the way they perceive the world of work. It will start with a general discussion on the ageing population and the challenges this demographic change presents. Secondly, the Dutch context is outlined, with its specific reforms and policies. Five factors will be discussed in more detail: the Dutch national culture, the particularity of the creative industry; the trade union membership of the employees; the occupational status of the employees under study and the age of the employees.

2.1. The ageing population

The workforce is ageing, a trend that presents some serious challenges on a societal, organizational and individual level (OECD, 2011). Several demographic trends will be outlined below, before discussing their implication for business and management.

First of all, life expectancy is rising in most countries (OECD, 2011). While cardiovascular disorders, obesity, and similar trends may temper expectations for continued increases in longevity, as a result of the medical advances and good social security systems worldwide, life expectancy will continue to raise leading to an increased expenditure on health and care (Mayhew, 2003). This will also mean that retirements have to be paid for a longer period of time (Ulrich & Brott, 2005).

Secondly, while the world's population is ageing rapidly, the total population in some more developed countries is simultaneously declining, as a result of a fertility rate below the population replacement rate of two live births per woman in the West. With a mean of 1.58 children per couple, Europe has its lowest fertility rate in history (Adsera, 2004). This means that relatively fewer people will enter the labor market in the future than in the past, although immigration will have a counter-effect on this trend. As a consequence, a labor shortage is forthcoming since a large cohort of older employees born right after the Second World War, the so-called baby boom generation, is expected to retire at the same time (Duval, 2003). The European Commission forecasts that by 2030, the European Union will face a shortage of some 20.8 million people (6.8%) of working age (OECD, 2005). According to Young (2006) the retirement of the baby boom generation is therefore the most pressing Human Resource issue of the coming decade.

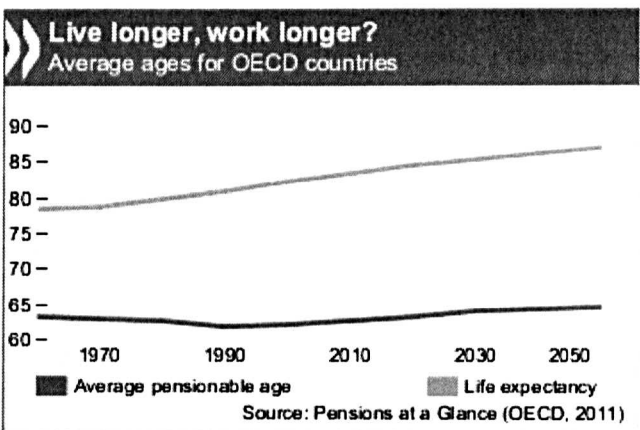
As people live longer and have fewer children, family structures as well as care providing of older people are changing (Meurs, Breaux & Perrewe, 2008). Increased individualization has led to a decline in the reliance on extended family members who provided informal care in the past. Not only is the divorce rate increasing rapidly, the percentage of older people living alone is rising in most countries, which increases the need for long-term care services like home nursing, community care and assisted living, residential care, and long-stay hospitals. This implies huge costs to the society. Furthermore, as a result of the increasing life-expectancy, working adults will have to support more and more several generations simultaneously.

Also, the average age at which employees enter the labor market has increased due to longer periods of study (Tucker, 2007). As a consequence there is a decrease in the number of productive years on the labor market. In addition, social insurance systems are evolving as a result of the ageing population (Sun & Suo, 2007). Many countries are revising their systems, since they foresee that it will be impossible to keep on paying for the ageing workforce. Budgetary pressure from ageing populations in OECD countries could add on average some 6% of GDP to government outlays on the aged (for pensions and health care) between 2000 and 2050 (OECD, 2003). A mix of earnings from continuous work, social insurance, occupational pensions and private savings will decide on the well-being of the ageing population.

Finally, as a result of the decreasing active workforce in relation to the increasing retired workforce, patterns of work and retirement are shifting. Many countries have decreased the official retirement age during the economic growth and the changing welfare philosophy of the past few decades (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Since many European countries were confronted with high rates a youth-unemployment, several specific incentives for older employees to leave the workplace were introduced. This has improved the older employee's financial situation which, together with mental and physical healthcare issues, is related to a decrease in the intended retirement age (Farr & Ringseis, 2002). Duval (2003) showed that public pensions provide enormous disincentives for continued work at older ages and encourage early retirement. Nowadays, widespread concern about the sustainability of some of Europe's public pension systems has led to a rapid closure of early exit gateways and the adoption of measures to encourage an extension of working life (OECD, 2006).

The report “Pensions at a Glance 2011” (OECD, 2011) says that by 2050 the average pensionable age in OECD countries will reach 65 for both sexes. But life expectancy is rising even faster. This means that the time spent in retirement will continue to grow, as can be seen in graph 2.1.

Graph 2.1: Average pensionable age and life expectancy for OECD countries.



Public pensions are the cornerstone of old age incomes today, accounting for 60% on average. The other 40% is made up almost equally of income from work and from private pensions and other savings. As public benefits are reduced through reforms, these other two sources will need to fill the gap. According to the OECD (2011), higher pension ages are only part of the answer, countries need to do more to fight discrimination, to provide training opportunities for older workers and to improve their working conditions (OECD, 2011).

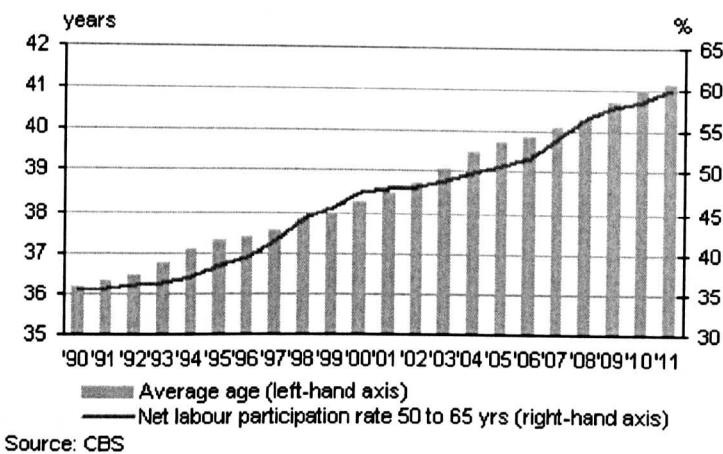
2.2 The ageing population in the Netherlands

The rate of the demographic ageing process in the Netherlands will double in the years to come. In the period 2011-2015, the over-65 population will grow by half a million versus a quarter of a million in the period 2006-2010 (Statistics Netherlands, 2011a). The acceleration is due to the baby boom generation born after the Second World War who now reaches the age of 65. By the year 2040, the over-65 population will include 4.6 million people versus 2.6 million in 2010 (Statistics Netherlands, 2011a). Over one quarter of the population will be 65 years of age or older in 2040. The proportion of over-80s is anticipated to grow to 10 percent around 2050, as opposed to 4 percent in 2010 (Statistics Netherlands, 2011a).

What does this mean for the labour force? The potential employed labour force (people aged between 15 and 65) comprised 10.1 million people in 2011 and is

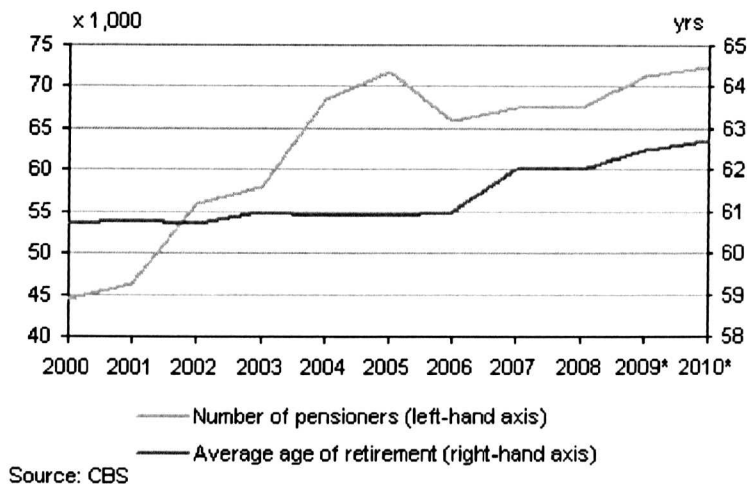
expected to decline by 0.8 million in the period up to 2040 (Statistics Netherlands, 2011a). The number of over-65s per 100 members of the potential employed labour force currently stands at 26 and is expected to increase to 43 per 100 in 2040, when the legal retirement age will be increased to 67. The labour force is ageing. The average age in the employed labour force has risen in 2011 to just over 41 years versus 36 years in the early 1990s (Statistics Netherlands, 2011a). The labour participation rate among 50 to 65-year-olds also increased noticeably, from 35 percent in 1990 to 60 percent in 2011, as can be seen in graph 2.2 below. The increase was mainly recorded among women. In the early 1990s, relatively few 50 to 60-year-old women were engaged in paid employment and the labour participation rate among men in the same age category was rather low, partly due to the then generous early retirement schemes. In 2011, employed men between 50 and 60 for the first time outnumbered those between 30 and 40.

Graph 2.2: Average age employed labour force and net labour participation rate in the 50 to 65-year-old population in the Netherlands.

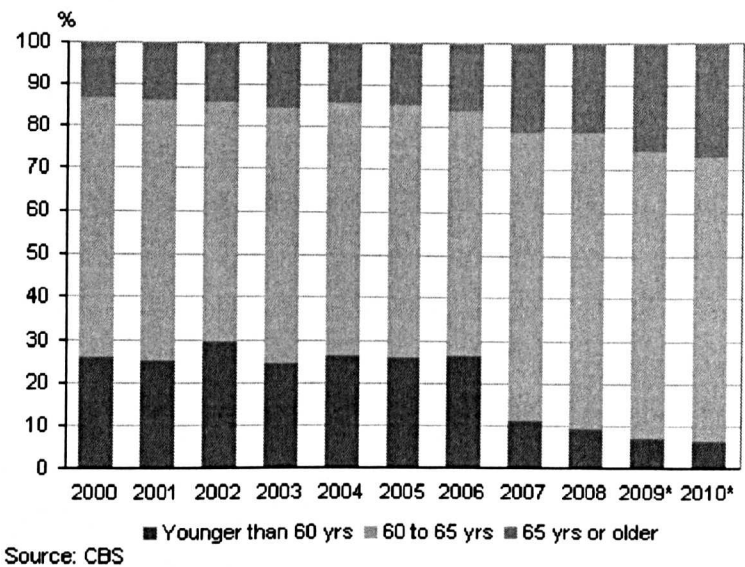


The average age of retirement for employees in the Netherlands had risen to 62.7 years in 2010 and the increase was observed across all sectors. In the period 2000–2006, the average age for employees to go into retirement had been 61 years, versus 62 years in 2007. Legislation changes were introduced in 2006 aiming to reduce early retirement. As a result, fewer people went into early retirement prior to their 60th birthday, as can be seen in graphs 2.3 and 2.4.

Graph 2.3: Number of retired employees and average age of retirement in the Netherlands.



Graph 2.4: Retirement age employees in the Netherlands.



2.3 The Dutch pension system

It is important to mention here the particularity of the Dutch pension system that is in strong contrast with the system in most other European countries, except for the United Kingdom. In the Netherlands, employees build up their own pension during their working lives, implying that a difference in the working population and the population in retirement has no influence on this system. The Netherlands has a balanced pension system comprised of three pillars: the basic old-age public pension scheme called AOW (Algemene Ouderdoms Wet), under a statutory national insurance scheme providing an equal pension for all residents; the collective occupational pension schemes to which employer and employees contribute in that takes the form of an individual fully funded pension; and the private pension scheme

consisting of private provisions (OECD, 2005). Although there is no statutory obligation for employers to offer a pension scheme to their employees, industrial-relations agreements mean that 91% of employees are covered (OECD, 2011). These schemes are therefore best thought of as quasi-mandatory. On average the public pension scheme accounts for 60% of the pension income, while the collective occupational pension scheme and the private pension scheme both constitute 20% (OECD, 2005). One receives the public pension scheme only at the legal retirement age. All residents are eligible for this benefit. It is possible to combine the public and occupational pension scheme with work. Indeed, some schemes allow a member to draw a pension and continue to work with the same employer. There is no legislation regarding this issue. However, the role of the basic public pension scheme has been declining, while the roles of occupational and private pensions are increasing (OECD, 2005). In contrast, in other countries the working population pays for the retirement of the older employees, implying that when many older employees retire, the working population will have to pay a disproportionate amount of money as a result of these demographic changes.

Labour force participation of older workers has traditionally been low in the Netherlands, compared to other OECD countries (De Vroom & Bannink, 2007). This is the result of many early exit measures that have been introduced to improve rates of employment amongst younger employees in the 1970's and 1980's (OECD, 2003). One of these measures was the VUT (Vervroegde Uittreding) scheme, a pay-as-you-go early retirement scheme aimed at reducing youth unemployment while offering early retirement for older employees. However, this has created a problem since it has stimulated older workers to retire early (Bratberg et al, 2004). For many years this VUT scheme has been the main early retirement scheme, which was very attractive since one got 75-80 percent of a last earned wage. As a consequence it provided an incentive for employees to leave the workplace around the age of 58. However, this trend has reversed since the mid-1990s (Statistics Netherlands, 2012a). The pay-as-you-go early retirement scheme is gradually being replaced by capital-funded pre-pension schemes, embedded in regular occupational pensions (OECD, 2011). As such, the integration of pre-pension schemes in occupational pensions is an incentive to work longer, since retiring early will lead to a reduced pension while retiring later leads to an augmented pension. In the early 1990s, the disability insurance benefit system WAO (Wet Arbeids Ongeschiktheid) was reformed and made less accessible. The disability insurance benefit system was easily available in

the past and contributed to the large number of registered disabled among older people. However, extensive screening of persons applying for the disability benefits has reduced this number as well as periodic reassessment for those with a possibility of recovery (OECD, 2005). In addition, the government required employers to pay a disability insurance premium to discourage employers to use disability benefit as a workforce management tool. As such, the attractiveness of disability insurance as a pathway to early retirement was decreased. Furthermore, in 2006 the tax deductions for pay-as-you-go early retirement and funded pre-pension arrangements were abandoned and the individual life course savings arrangements were introduced. Although the new life course arrangement allows individual workers to save for up to three years of early exit (exit at 62 years of age), these arrangements cannot be used to collectively lay off older employees when organizations are downsizing. The legal retirement age is also gradually increasing to the age of 67 by 2025. The unemployment benefit WW (Werkloosheid Wet) is a much less attractive and therefore a much less important alternative exit route.

On the side of the older employees themselves, the government has decided to reduce the duration of unemployment benefits and to reinstate job-search requirements for the older unemployed from 2004 onwards. A major obstacle is seniority-based pay, which remains dominant in the Netherlands, making older employees relatively unattractive to employers. Zwick (2011) showed that large and profitable establishments as well as establishments with a highly qualified workforce pay high seniority wages and that older employees' wages set higher than their productivity. This has given employers an incentive to collaborate with older employees so that they can retire early (OECD, 2003).

In addition to the above mentioned measures taken by the Dutch government, laws and regulations regarding the equal treatment of older employees were reinforced and implemented. In 2004, the Act on Equal Treatment in relation to age was implemented in a response to the European Directive of November 2000. This act makes unlawful distinctions in the context of work and labor conditions that may lead to direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of age, unless such distinctions are 'objectively justified' (Bannink & De Vroom, 2007). The Dutch government also introduced new guidelines for redundancies. Selective dismissal is no longer allowed and both the principle of last-in-first-out and dismissals mirroring the age composition of the workforce of the firm are now more generally applied.

What is more, the cost of sickness absence has been transferred from the collective level to the individual company (Bannink & De Vroom, 2007). In the Netherlands, the first year of disability was covered by the Sickness Insurance Act, so organizations did not feel any incentive to optimize labour conditions in order to increase the employability of employees. However, this collective sickness insurance arrangement has been replaced by an obligation to the employer to continue to pay the wage during that year, which functions as a financial disincentive for allowing sickness absence (Bannink & De Vroom, 2007). This implies that companies feel an incentive to prevent sickness absence. Although it is possible that employers opt for a heavy handed management style, trying to avoid sickness absence, it is also possible in the light of the ageing population that employers will realize that changing the working conditions for older employees could have the same effect. All laws and regulations mentioned above form together a strong incentive to implement age-related HR policies for older employees.

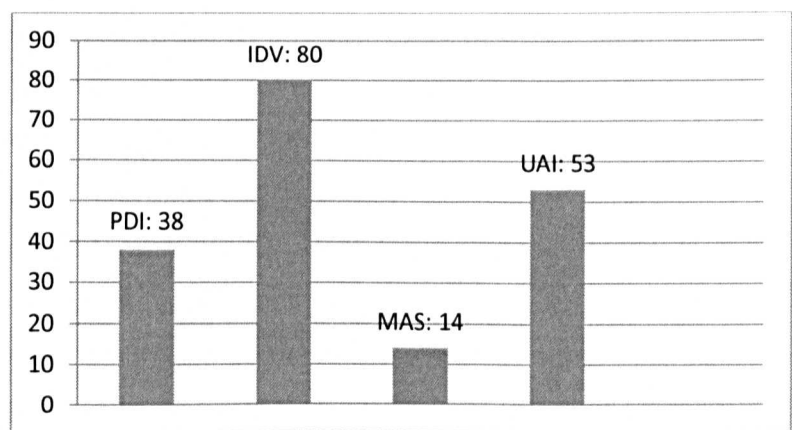
We will now turn to five factors that form the context in which this thesis took place: the Dutch culture, the creative industry, trade union membership, the occupational status of the employees under study and the age of the employees.

2.4 The Dutch culture

The Dutch pension system in which everyone builds up his or her own pension influences the findings in that people could look less at the overall picture (ageing population, everyone needs to work longer), but could look at what it means for them individually. However, in contrast with this expectation, the interviewees in this study emphasized that they saw the ageing population as a “problem” that concerns everyone and that they consider it normal that they have to work longer than expected, although they did not appreciate it. It seems that they look at the global picture, thereby forgetting almost their own interest. This makes the Dutch culture an interesting country to study, which will be looked at in more detail below. The Dutch cultural anthropologist Hofstede (2001) has identified four cultural dimensions. These dimensions are power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), masculinity (MAS) and uncertainty avoidance (UAI). These dimensions will be briefly discussed below and it will be discussed how they might influence the findings. Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Individualism versus collectivism is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find

societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Masculinity versus femininity refers to the distribution of roles between the genders. This dimension varies from masculine: very assertive and competitive to feminine: modest and caring. Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates to what extent one feels either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures. Uncertainty accepting cultures are more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to; they try to have as few rules as possible.

Graph 2.5: Hofstede’s scores for the Netherlands on the four cultural dimensions.



As can be seen in graph 2.5 above, the Netherlands scores very high on the individualism dimension, indicating individualistic attitudes and loose bonds with other society members. It has a moderate score on uncertainty avoidance and a fairly low score on power distance, indicating that there is little hierarchy and that employees of all levels have something to say (Schwartz, 1999). It has a low score on masculinity, which means that men and women are seen and treated as equal members of society (Van Oudenhoven, 2001). It also indicates that caring values are important in the Netherlands (Schwartz, 1999; Smith & Dugan, 1996).

The Dutch national culture influences the findings of this study in several ways and it is therefore important to see the results in their context. For example, being a fairly feminine country (Hofstede, 2001), values like work-life balance and recognition and respect are surely more present than if the same study were to be

conducted in a more masculine society (Smith & Dugan, 1996). The fact that the Netherlands is the first part-time economy in the world (Visser, 2000) can be linked to this. As such, the importance of HR practices related to flexible work options might be overstated as a result of the national culture in which this study was conducted (Van Oudenhoven, 2001; Taras, Kirkman & Steel, 2010). The low score on power distance shows that people at different levels in the hierarchy easily interact with one another and also expect to be able to talk to their bosses for example, while this would not be expected in high power distance countries (Taras, Kirkman & Steel, 2010).

Secondly, this thesis was conducted in 2009. In 2009 the worldwide economic and financial crisis could be felt by many organizations, leading to cost-cutting practices. Economic growth or decline influences organizational policies regarding older employees (Hallberg, 2011). During economic growth, organizations usually expand and fine-tune age-awareness HR policies, while during economic stagnation or decline organizations start downsizing, which affects older employees in either a direct way by laying them off, or in an indirect way by supporting internal mobility of younger employees. Hallberg (2011) studied the way in which labor market fluctuations affect the transition to early retirement among older employees in Sweden and found that downturns in aggregated industry employment increases the probability of early retirement. It implies at the same time that if the study would have been conducted in years of economic growth, the outcomes of the study would possibly be different. More precisely, it is expected that older employees' perception of the quality of HR practices designed for older employees may be more positive than is the case nowadays during the economic crisis.

Finally, it should be mentioned that people have an orthodox working ethic in the Netherlands and that working hard without complaining is the rule (Taras, Kirkman & Steel, 2010). It is generally expected from an employee to give one's full potential, work hard and be flexible, but it is also expected from the organization that it cares about the employee's well-being, providing personalized benefit packages and practices (Schwartz, 1999; Smith & Dugan, 1996). Since this study looks at older employees with an average low occupational status it could be that these employees give their 100% expecting a caring organization in return. However, organizations might take less care of employees with a low occupational status, leading to an unmet expectation on the side of the employee that in turn leads to negative organizational outcomes.

2.5 The creative industry in the Netherlands

The second factor that will be explained is the choice of the creative industry in the Netherlands. The Dutch government and the European Union are increasingly interested in the creative industry, partly as a result of the book 'The Rise of the Creative Class' by Richard Florida in 2002, where Florida states that the presence of creative people is an important factor determining the location of a business and as such a driving force behind the economic growth and more importantly based on several reports of the European Commission. According to Florida (2002), the creative industry offers an attractive image, more employment and innovation. The European Commission published a green paper (European Commission, 2010) in 2010 and another report 'Design for Growth & Prosperity: Report and Recommendations of the European Design Leadership Board' in September 2012 about the importance of this industry for the Dutch economy. In line with the European agenda under the terms of the Lisbon agreement, both reports stated that Europe wants to use the creative industries as a driver of innovation and thus economic growth (European Commission, 2012). The Federation of Dutch Creative Industries also highlights the importance of these industries (Federation of Dutch Creative Industries, 2013). They state that the creative industry plays a key part in building a sustainable and innovative society in the Netherlands. Furthermore, it becomes clear in several governmental reports that the Dutch government expects the industry to contribute substantially to the innovative capacity of the Dutch economy. Because the creative industry has already a strong position in the economy and has the potential to grow even further; this industry has been chosen by the government as a top-sector (Topteam Creatieve Industrie, 2011). This means that the government, together with researchers, policy makers and business people directly invest in the creative industry. Together, they form the Dutch creative council, which is an independent advisory body of the government, who have put the creative industry high on the agenda when it comes to innovation and the economy (Topteam Creatieve Industrie, 2011).

The creative industry is a sector based on the ability of individuals, groups, businesses and organizations to create (Rutten, Koops & Roso, 2010). For an occupation to belong to the creative industry, three criteria have been identified: creative area of work (for example writing, designing or exercising the visual arts), direction of work (for example choreographer, producer or editor) and level of work (higher vocational education level or university level) (Braams & Urlings, 2011).

However, some occupations with a lower work level have been included too in the definition of the creative industry in the Netherlands (for example circus performer, photographer or disc jockeys) (Braams & Urlings, 2010).

The choice of the creative industry in the Netherlands influences the findings of this thesis. The creative industry is changing rapidly, due to technological developments and many older employees are leaving this industry (Braaksma, de Jong & Stam, 2005; Braams & Urlings, 2010). Due to this trend, the industry was chosen in order to examine how the perception of the quality of HR practices for older employees influences their commitment, job performance and preference for early retirement. The creative industry is an industry that can be characterized by irregular working schedules and salaries, long working hours and constant technological changes. These characteristics could possibly explain why there is a trend that older employees are leaving the industry. The creative industry is a growing industry where we find many different occupations. However, the artistic/creative aspect of their occupations is often important and the salaries and working conditions are relatively bad (Braaksma, de Jong & Stam, 2005; Braams & Urlings, 2011). As such, people working in this industry can be depicted as driven and passionate, while accepting the often irregular working hours and/or income and the physical hardship of their jobs for example. As a result of the characteristics of this industry, it is likely that issues like irregular salary, periods of unemployment, having machines taking over more and more work, working shifts or physically strenuous jobs are more common among people working in this industry than in the total working population.

2.5.1 Clusters of occupations within the creative industry in the Netherlands

Statistics Netherlands (Braams & Urlings, 2010) has identified three clusters within the creative industry, based on the Standard Occupational Classification (Standaard Beroepenclassificatie, SBC). The clusters are 'arts', 'media and entertainment' and 'creative professional services' (Braams & Urlings, 2010). Especially the last cluster is growing.

The cluster 'arts' is mostly composed of visual artists. Journalists and photographers fall under the 'media and entertainment' cluster while the 'creative professional services' cluster includes graphical designers, book illustrators and architects. In the 'arts' cluster there are relatively many older people and self-

employed persons. There are also more Western immigrants than in the other clusters and the gender distribution is more balanced than in the total working population.

Most people work in the ‘creative professional services’ cluster. 80% is male and more than two-third of all people are under the age of 44 years. Most of them are employees and almost 80% work 35 hours or more a week. The ‘media and entertainment’ cluster is characterized by a mix of the two previously presented clusters.

2.5.2 Characteristics of the occupations in the creative industry in the Netherlands

About 180 000 people worked in the creative industry for at least 12 hours a week in 2007-2009 (Braams & Urlings, 2010) and it is a growing sector. This is 2,5% of the total working population in the Netherlands. The population exists of all persons aged 15-65 who work in the creative industry.

Characteristic of the creative industry is the high number of self-employed people, 47% against 14% in the total working population. They also work often in small organizations with less than 10 employees. The average hours of employment of people working in the creative industry is higher than the number of hours worked by the total working population in the Netherlands. Almost 70% in the creative industry works more than 35 hours a week, while this is true for 61% in the overall working population.

Table 2.1: People working the creative industry in the Netherlands in 2006-2008 in numbers and percentages.

	Number x 1 000	%
Arts	57	33%
Media and entertainment	43	25%
Creative professional services	71	42%
Total	172	100%

Source: Statistics Netherlands

The age distribution in the creative industry is similar to the working population in the Netherlands. The average age of all people working in the creative industry is 41 years. About 33% is younger than 35 years, 30% is between 35-44 years and just over a third is 45 years and older. The cluster ‘arts’ has more older people than the other clusters, more than 40% is 45 years or older in the ‘arts’ cluster. 13% exists of

Western immigrants, which is slightly higher than the national average of 8%. Regarding gender, 67% of the persons working the creative industry are men, while this percentage is 57% in the working population as a whole. Table 2.2 below gives the percentages of all people working in the creative industry in the Netherlands broken down by gender, age and origin.

Table 2.2: People working in the creative industry, broken down by gender, age and origin in 2006-2008 in percentages (source: Statistics Netherlands).

	% in creative industry	% in working population
Men	67%	57%
Women	33%	43%
15-24 years	5%	11%
25-34 years	28%	23%
35-44 years	30%	28%
45-54 years	23%	25%
55-64 years	14%	13%
Native Dutch	81%	82%
Western immigrants	13%	8%
Non-western immigrants	5%	9%
Unknown	1%	1%

Only 30% of the people in the creative industry have finished a creative education. 70% has not followed a creative education and their educational background is very diverse.

2.5.3 Characteristics of the organizations in the creative industry in the Netherlands

There are 43 000 organizations in the creative industry in the Netherlands in 2009, making up 5% of all Dutch business (Braams & Urlings, 2010). The industry is growing, with more new businesses than the Dutch average (Braams & Urlings, 2010). 27 000 organizations belong to the 'creative professional services' cluster, 60% of which are advertising agencies. 11% belong to the cluster 'arts'. Half of the 'media and entertainment' cluster exists of photography. Publishers and film producers also belong to this cluster. The table below shows this.

Table 2.3: Organizations in the creative industry per sector in 2009 in number and percentages (source: Statistics Netherlands).

	Number of organizations	%
Arts	4 960	11%
Media and entertainment	11 110	26%
Creative professional services	27 225	63%
Total creative industry	43 295	100%
Share creative industry of total businesses in NL	844 450	5%

There are many small organizations in the creative industry in the Netherlands. 66% of all organizations exist of only 1 person, while only 1% has 50 employees or more, as can be seen in table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Characteristics of size of organizations in the creative industry in the Netherlands in percentages (source: Statistics Netherlands).

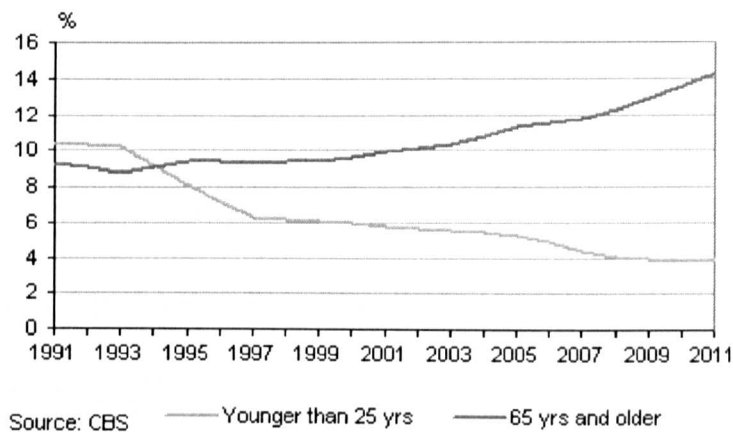
Size of organization	Arts	Media/entertainment	Creative professional services
1 person	42%	68%	70%
2-10 persons	40%	26%	25%
10-50 persons	15%	5%	4%
>50 persons	3%	1%	1%

2.6 Trade union membership

The third factor that will be discussed in more detail is the trade union membership of FNV-KIEM. This study has used the database of the trade union FNV-KIEM, which is the trade union of the creative industry in the Netherlands. FNV-KIEM has a total of 34 286 members of which 73,5% is men. Their age ranges from 14 to 100 years, with an average age of 55. No information is available about the educational background of the trade union members and 16% is self-employed. Membership of the trade union FNV-KIEM costs between €4,88 and €16,27 per month, depending on one's personal situation and income. Membership of Dutch trade unions rose by 5000 in 2011 compared with 2010. One in seven trade union members are older than 65. In 2011, 1.9 million people in the Netherlands were members of a trade union (Statistics Netherlands, 2011b). The number of trade union members aged 65 years and older has risen by 6.8 percent in 2011. This means the trade union movement is ageing faster than the Dutch population, in which the number of over-65s rose by 2.3 percent in the same period. In 2011, 269 thousand union members are entitled to old age pension, and together account for 14 percent of union membership. This is

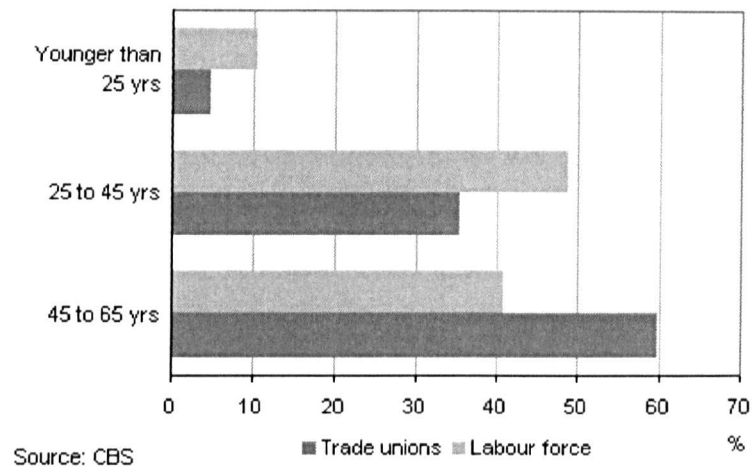
important because several trends can be identified: on the one hand the creative industry is increasing, while older employees are leaving this industry. At the same time we see that more and more older employees are becoming a member of the trade union of this industry. It might be that although the creative industry is growing, older employees can not or do not want to stay for certain reasons and if they do, they become a member of the trade union in order to be heard, to have a voice.

Graph 2.6: Percentage of younger and older trade union members in the Netherlands.



The number of trade union members aged between 45 and 65 years has been rising steadily since 2005. Compared with the labour force, this group is strongly overrepresented; it accounts for 60 percent of all members over the age of 65, compared with just over 40 percent of the labour force under the age of 65. The share of members aged between 25 and 45 years has decreased continually since 2005, to 36 percent in 2011, while this age group accounts for nearly half of the labour force (Statistics Netherlands, 2011b).

Graph 2.7: Trade unions and labour force by age group in the Netherlands, 2011.



In order to compare the characteristics of the trade union members overall and the participants in this study, table 2.5 below shows which percentage of members works in which sector within the creative industry and how this percentage relates to the percentage of participants of this study.

Table 2.5: Percentages per sector in the trade union versus in this study.

Sector	Percentage in trade union	Percentage in this study
Audiovisual sector	8,9%	10%
Arts sector	33,1%	22,3%
Graphical sector	35,4%	43,8%
Prepublishing sector	2,3%	1,5%
Packaging sector	6,7%	8%
Publishers	13,6%	14,4%
Total	100%	100%

The trade union is the biggest trade union in the creative industry in the Netherlands. It represents employees who work for organizations, freelancers, people who have started their own small businesses or people who are currently unemployed but are looking for a job in this industry. This trade union arranges collective issues like the collective labor agreements and pensions; it provides training, special services for people who run their own business and can help in case of legal and administrative problems.

The participants and interviewees in this study have been chosen randomly from the database and are only stratified by age. They are thus representative for all FNV-KIEM members over the age of 45. However, not everyone working in the creative industry is a member of this trade union and this brings in some bias. It

might well be that those people who have chosen not to be a member of the trade union differ in some ways from those who decided to become a member. They might be skeptical about what the trade union could do for them or maybe they are more satisfied, not feeling the need to be a member of a trade union. However, it is impossible to know in what way those two groups (union members and non-members) differ from one another.

2.7 Occupational status

Another factor that needs to be discussed is the occupational status of the employees in the present study. The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) is one of the main international classifications for which the International Labour Organization (ILO) is responsible. It belongs to the international family of economic and social classifications. ISCO is a tool for organizing jobs into a clearly defined set of groups according to the tasks and duties undertaken in the job. Its main aims are to provide: a basis for the international reporting, comparison and exchange of statistical and administrative data about occupations; a model for the development of national and regional classifications of occupations; and a system that can be used directly in countries that have not developed their own national classifications.

The first version of ISCO was adopted in 1957 by the Ninth International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS). It is known as ISCO-58. This version was followed by ISCO-68, which was adopted by the Eleventh ICLS in 1966. The third version, ISCO-88, was adopted by the Fourteenth ICLS in 1987. ISCO has recently been updated to take into account developments in the world of work since 1988 and to make improvements in light of experience gained in using ISCO-88. The updated classification was adopted in December 2007 and is known as ISCO-08. Many countries are now updating their national classification based on ISCO-08 to improve alignment with the new international statistical standard. Statistics Netherlands uses from 2012 onwards only the ISCO-08 for coding occupations.

This occupational classification is a tool for organizing all jobs in an establishment, an industry or a country into a clearly defined set of groups according to the tasks and duties undertaken in the job. The classification system gives the guidelines on how jobs are to be classified into the most detailed groups of the classification and how these detailed groups are to be further aggregated into broader groups. It includes the occupational titles and codes, and represents a value set for the variable 'occupation', a variable which describes the different tasks and duties of

jobs. A job is defined for the purposes of ISCO-08 as a set of tasks and duties performed, or meant to be performed, by one person, including for an employer or in self employment. An occupation is defined as a set of jobs whose main tasks and duties are characterised by a high degree of similarity. A person may be associated with an occupation through the main job currently held, a second job or a job previously held. Jobs are classified by occupation with respect to the type of work performed, or to be performed. The basic criteria used to define the system of major, sub-major, minor and unit groups are the “skill level” and “skill specialization” required to competently perform the tasks and duties of the occupations.

The ISCO-08 has been used in many previous scientific studies. Both in management (O’Dorchai, 2011; Markowitsch & Plaimauer, 2009) and outside this field (Christopher, 2010; Huss et al., 2013; Niedhammer et al., 2009). The reason why the cited studies are all relatively recent is because this classification system was launched in 2008, so researchers started using it in their studies from this year onwards, leading to publications a few years afterwards.

In line with previous studies, ISCO-08 was used in the present study to classify the occupations of the participants in order to compare the average occupational level of the participants with the average level of participants in previous studies. Occupational status is defined in this study as the rank of a certain occupation of an individual. This rank is based on the skill level and skill specialization that one needs to be able to properly perform the occupation. A “low occupational status” is defined in this study as having a rank 1 or 2 occupation, while a “high occupational status” can be defined as having an occupation that falls in rank 3 or 4. The ISCO-08 guidelines were used. The ISCO-08 has four ranks. Previous studies have used managers as their sample, falling in category 4 here. However, the present study has investigated people from the 4 different categories. Examples of rang 1 occupations are helpers in offices, cleaners, manufacturing labourers and hand packers. Occupations that belong to rang 2 are for example assemblers, machine operators, dress makers and printers. Regarding rang 3 clerical support workers, audio-visual technicians, photographers and designers can be found while event planners, manufacturing managers, film producers and multimedia developers can be found in rang 4.

The following table shows all the occupations of all the participants. For each occupation, the rank as well as the percentage of individuals having this occupation are depicted.

Table 2.6: All occupations, ranks and percentages of participants for each occupation.

Occupation	Rank	Percentage of participants
Hand packers	1	1,1%
Office helpers	1	3,2%
Sweepers and related labourers	1	2,8%
Cleaners	1	3,1%
Packing bottling and labelling machine operators	2	2,8%
Electrical and electronic equipment assemblers	1	3,1%
Typists and word-processing operators	2	0,5%
Mechanical machinery assemblers	2	0,3%
Shoemaking and related machine operators	2	0,2%
Sewing machine operators	2	0,3%
Weaving and knitting machine operators	2	0,3%
Paper products machine operators	2	0,4%
Print finishing and binding workers	2	1,8%
Printers	2	2,5%
Woodworking-machine and tool setters and operators	2	0,8%
Plastic products machine operators	2	0,2%
Rubber products machine operators	2	0,1%
Photographic products machine operators	2	0,4%
Process control technicians not elsewhere specified	2	0,8%
Pulp and papermaking plant operators	2	0,2%
Upholsterers and related workers	2	0,3%
Sewing embroidery and related workers	2	0,3%
Garment and related pattern-makers and cutters	2	0,4%
Tailors, dressmakers, furriers and hatters	2	0,7%
Weaving and knitting machine setters	2	0,8%
Handicraft workers in textile, leather and related materials	2	0,2%
Pre-press technicians	2	4%

Printing machine setters, takers-off	2	2,6%
Sign writers, decorative painters, engravers and etchers	2	0,2%
Lens polishers, grinders, moulders and slicers	2	0,1%
Glass makers, cutters, grinders and finishers	2	0,2%
Potters and related workers	2	0,2%
Jewellery and precious-metal workers	2	1,1%
Musical instrument makers and tuners	2	0,8%
Precision-instrument makers and repairers	2	0,2%
Receptionists	2	2%
Contact centre information clerks	2	3%
Secretaries	2	1,2%
Mail carriers and sorting clerks	2	2,1%
Filing and copying clerks	2	0,8%
Information and communications technology installers and servicers	3	0,2%
Electronics mechanics and servicers	3	0,3%
Blacksmiths, hammersmiths and forging press workers	3	0,1%
Sheet-metal workers	3	0,1%
Beauticians and related workers	3	0,5%
Hairdressers	3	0,3%
Manufacturing supervisors	3	1,2%
Transport conductors	3	0,8%
Telephone switchboard operators	3	1,3%
Bookmakers, croupiers and related gaming workers	3	0,4%
Personnel clerks	3	1,6%
Creative and performing artists not elsewhere classified	3	2,8%
Dancers and choreographers	3	0,3%
Musicians, singers and composers	3	0,6%
Announcers on radio, television and other media	3	0,2%
Interior designers and decorators	3	0,3%
Graphic and multimedia designers	4	1,9%
Product and garment designers	4	0,8%
Other arts teachers	3	0,2%

Telecommunications engineering technicians	3	1,3%
Broadcasting and audio-visual technicians	3	2,1%
Photographers	3	2,1%
Web technicians	3	0,3%
Actors	3	0,8%
Visual artists	3	2%
Film, stage and related directors and producers	4	3%
Advertising and marketing professionals	4	7%
Web and multimedia developers	4	3,6%
Software and applications developers and analysts	4	2,1%
Application programmers	4	1,3%
Information and communications technology service managers	4	1,8%
Advertising and public relations managers	4	2,5%
Sales and marketing managers	4	2,3%
Manufacturing managers	4	5,2%
Event planners	4	1,9%

As a summary, in the quantitative study 30,7% had a rang 4 occupation, 24,2% a rang 3 occupation, 34,9% a rang 2 occupation and 10,2% a rang 1 occupation. This gives an average rang of 2,65. This is depicted in table 2.7.

Table 2.7: Rang of the occupations according to ISCO-08 in the quantitative study in percentages.

Rang	Percentage
1	10,2%
2	34,9%
3	24,2%
4	30,7%

The problem with this approach is that the researcher can not make a statement about “low occupational status employees” when over half of my sample (54,9%) actually has a occupation that falls in the category “high occupational status”, which is rang 3 and 4. Although the average occupational level of 2.65 in the quantitative study is indeed well below the average of 4 in previous studies, having many older employees in rang 3 and 4 in the sample does strongly influence the findings. In order to partially overcome this important flaw, it was decided to make a distinction

between the high versus the low occupational status interviewees in the qualitative study, which will be presented in chapter 5: the findings of the qualitative study. It will examine if there are any differences between those two groups and this will be discussed in the discussion and conclusion chapter at the end of this thesis.

The qualitative study also examined older employees from the 4 different rangs. However, as can be seen in the table below, only a small percentage belonged to rang 3 and 4. The average rang in the qualitative study was 2.13.

Table 2.8: Rang of the occupations according to ISCO-08 in the qualitative study in percentages.

Rang	Percentage
1	20%
2	53,3%
3	20%
4	6,7%

As can be seen in the table above, in the qualitative study only 2 interviewees belonged to rang 4, both of them were self-employed. 6 interviewees could be classified as having a rang 3 occupation. However, over 73% of the interviewees had an occupation that would fall under rang 1 or 2. Since both interviewees that had a rang 4 occupation were also self-employed, it is difficult to know if the findings of those two interviewees were different from the other interviewees based on their occupational status or based on their self-employed status. Clearly, as outlined in the discussion chapter, more research is needed to clarify this point.

The fact that this study looks at older employees with an on average lower occupational status than those older employees used in previous studies is important because it is expected that this influences the findings. Although older employees with a high occupational status (rang 4 according to ISCO-08) are likely to have challenging jobs with many responsibilities, older employees with a lower occupational status are more likely to have jobs that have little prospects for growth, that are more repetitive in nature, are physically harder to execute and are mentally less challenging. This is likely to have an influence on how they experience the world of work, their commitment and their attitude towards retirement. Generally, people with a higher occupational status enjoy a higher salary, allowing them to think about other factors influencing their retirement decision except their financial situation for example. As such, the average occupational status of the older employees in this study is an important point in this thesis.

2.8 The age of the employees

This study only looks at older employees and does not pretend to compare the results with any other age group. It was decided to look at older employees because issues related to retirement only apply to older employees. It was felt that it would not make sense to ask younger employees about when they would want to retire and which factors would influence this.

This section will define older employees, explains the choice for a chronological approach to the concept of age and will justify the age threshold used in the present study.

In this study, older employees are defined as employees aged 45 or above. Although the term 'older workers' is commonly used, researchers agree that there is no agreement on a chronological threshold (Maurer, 2001; Lazarra & Bombelli, 2011).

'Chronological age' is often seen as an unsatisfactory way of measuring age (Settersten & Mayer, 1997; Sterns & Miklos, 1995), since ageing refers to changes that are biological, psychological, and social in nature. In other words, this process is different for each individual and has an influence on the personal, organizational, and societal level (Lange et al, 2006; Settersten & Mayer, 1997; Sterns & Miklos, 1995). Individuals with the same chronological age may differ in terms of health, career stage, and family status. Chronological age is thus a limited way of looking at the variable age. Sterns and Doverspike (1989) distinguished five different approaches to conceptualize ageing of workers: chronological age, referring to one's calendar age; functional or performance-based age: based on a worker's performance, recognizing that there is a great variation in individual abilities and functioning through different ages; psychosocial or subjective age: based on the self and the social perception of age; and organizational age: referring to the ageing of individuals in jobs and organizations and lastly the life span concept of age that advances the possibility for behavioral change at any point in the life cycle.

Chronological age is therefore too rigid to capture the diverse range of people, behaviors and mindsets at a certain age, which has been confirmed by several researchers. For example, Claes and Heymans (2008) used focus groups and content analysis to get more insights about work motivation and retention policy and practices of older workers in Belgium. Through thematic content analysis they revealed the diversity in the concerns and experiences of contemporary older workers

like age discrimination, economic recession, financial concerns, desire for part-time work and specific work environments, need for structure and meaningful activity, relational disruptions at work and their need to reposition one-self or to preserve identity. According to Claes and Heymans (2008) this diversity within the group of older workers arises from individual differences, like personality traits, work attitudes, work motivation, life events and career stage and from job characteristics, like employment contract, hierarchical position, and seniority.

One can go even further. Not only chronological age, but even ‘age’ is a fuzzy variable containing time, generation, tenure and selection effects (De Lange et al, 2009). It may well reflect the cultural values of those who are now old and still at work, rather than the cumulative effect of the amount of time passed on these employees (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Therefore, the validity of the variable age or chronological age is often unclear, since one can measure several different aspects that are due to individual, organizational and job characteristics.

Using chronological age has also been considered inappropriate for another reason. Several researchers have shown that labelling workers above a certain age as ‘older workers’ can lead to stigmatization, negative stereotyping and prejudices (Henkens, 2005; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976). This can in turn lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, which means that those workers who have been labeled as ‘older workers’ start behaving in accordance with the stereotypes the society has regarding this group. They start to believe the stereotypes, consider themselves as less competent and stop applying for promotions and withdraw from participation in training programs for example. They turn the stereotypes others have of the stigmatized group ‘older workers’ into reality (Berger, 2006).

Although chronological age is the commonly used way to study concepts related to one’s age, other conceptualizations of age do exist and have been studied. They seem to have different effects on work-related attitudes. For example, Cleveland and McFarlane Shore (1992) have found that an employee’s chronological age, an employee’s subjective age (self-perception), an employee’s social age (others’ perception), and an employee’s relative age (compared with the employee’s work group), differentially predicted job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Employees who perceived themselves to be older than most people in their work group, for example, exhibited more job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. However, these conceptualizations of the variable age were considered out of scope of the present study. Despite all the

problems related to the use of chronological age, it is difficult to find a better solution because companies use chronological age to define older workers in their HR policies and it is chronological age that determines eligibility to retirement (Lange et al, 2006).

The next issue concerns the age threshold to define older employees from employees in other age groups. Different thresholds have been used in previous research to refer to older employees. Muijnck and Zwinkels (2002) argue that researchers examining older people in organizations often put the threshold at 40 or 45, seeing “old” as referring to obsolete knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Warr (2001) also used the age of 45 to refer to ‘older employees’. However, other researchers have reached agreement about the age of 50 being an acceptable cut-off point to distinguish between older and younger workers (Hassel & Perrewe, 1995). Simpson, Greller and Stroh (2002) for example, stated that career development and work attitudes after 50 years of age are quite different from those at earlier ages. Also the OECD (2006) adopted 50 years as the age threshold for ‘older workers’ since it marks the beginning of a decline in age-participation rates in many countries. Although it was planned to put the threshold at 50, which would be in line with the OECD (2006), the results of the exploratory qualitative study of this thesis showed that employees aged 45 already experienced age discrimination, which is in accordance with findings obtained by Statistics Netherlands (Braams & Urlings, 2011) for the creative industry. This is in line with Lazarra and Bombelli (2011) who found that age discrimination does not follow the same pattern across work contexts. They found that the position held by the employee influence discriminatory behavior towards older workers on the part of employers. As a result, the age threshold adopted in this study is 45. Older employees are thus defined as employees aged 45 or over.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter gave an overview of the context in which this study took place in order to fully understand the scale and nature of the study. It has been explained why more research about older employees is necessary in the light of the ageing population and how the Netherlands is dealing with this demographic change. It has also become clear how the creative industry, trade union membership, the occupational status of the participants and national culture might affect the findings. The context in which this study takes place has led to the hypotheses and research issues that will be

discussed in more detail in the next chapter. On this basis we now move on to the theory and a review of the literature in order to give an overview of previous research.

Chapter 3: Literature Review : Theory and Research Issues

This thesis tries to give more insights about older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands about the way they view work and several concepts like job performance, commitment and the retirement decision. There are several theories that could explain the perceptions and experiences of older employees with a low occupational status. In the thesis I am using the social exchange theory as theoretical framework, because it has been successfully applied to older employees, but to my knowledge, not yet to older employees with an average low occupational status. However, although the social exchange theory was chosen as framework, one should keep in mind that other theories that are based on different assumptions could also be helpful in explaining the findings.

This chapter will review the relevant literature and explains and justifies the chosen theoretical framework used in this thesis: the social exchange theory. The chapter first presents several theories that could be particularly useful in research on older employees and these theories will be used to explain the findings in the discussion and conclusion chapter. Then, the social exchange theory will be explained in general and finally it is explained how this theoretical framework applies to the present study. The second part of this chapter will review the literature and will present the research issues and hypotheses.

3.1 Theoretical approaches

This chapter starts with an overview of several theories that could provide useful explanations for the findings of this thesis and are all relevant to older employees with an average low occupational status.

3.1.1 The social identity theory

The social identity theory is the theoretical framework that after having obtained the findings of the qualitative and quantitative studies provides the most plausible explanation of those findings. This will be discussed in greater depth in chapter seven: the discussion and conclusion. However, a short overview of this theory will be given below.

The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) argues that an individual has one identity made up of several social identities. Social identity is the

individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). After being categorized as a group member, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparison out-group on some valued dimension. This theory is interesting in the study of older employees, since previous studies have shown that the adoption of a certain identity can lead to stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination (Turner et al, 1987). It is therefore an interesting theoretical framework to use in the relationship between company policy and the retirement decision. It might be that the provision of HR practices designed for older employees makes them feel part of this socially devalued group, which positively influences their preference for early retirement. Similarly, being categorized as an 'older employee', individuals might start behaving in accordance with stereotypes of this stigmatized social group and decrease their performance and their commitment to the organization.

3.1.2 The socio-emotional selectivity theory

Another theory that relates to older employees is the socio-emotional selectivity theory. The socio-emotional selectivity theory is a life-span theory of how time horizons shape human motivation (Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles, 1999). According to socio-emotional selectivity theory, goals are always set in temporal contexts. In other words, older individuals who feel that the time they have left is limited tend to focus on emotionally meaningful aspects of life, such as the desire to lead a meaningful life, to have emotionally intimate social relationships, and to feel socially interconnected. As such, this theory predicts age-related changes in motivation (Carstensen & Mikels, 2005). Socio-emotional selectivity theory states that people place increasing value on emotionally meaningful goals as they get older, and invest more cognitive and social resources in obtaining them (Carstensen, Isaacowitz & Charles, 1999). This shift in motivation toward emotional goals promotes emotion regulation and also leads to a tendency where older people tend to focus on positive information compared to negative information (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer & Vohs, 2001). This is called the positivity effect. This theoretical framework is useful in studies examining factors that influence the retirement decision. According to the socio-emotional theory, one would expect that older employees have a biased positive perception of the quality of HR practices, since they focus on positive information. According to this theory, one would also

expect to find that the social aspects of organizational life are important to older employees.

3.1.3 The continuity theory

The continuity theory provides explanations on how older individuals experience and deal with the ageing process. This theory holds that older individuals try to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures (Atchley, 1989). So personality, values, morals, preferences, role activity, and basic patterns of behavior are consistent throughout the life span. In other words, it states that individuals want to keep a sense of continuity and that they prefer to accomplish this objective by using strategies that are linked to their past experiences (Atchley, 1989).

3.1.4 The human capital theory

Another theoretical framework is the human capital theory (Becker, 1962). The human capital theory states that an organization can invest in human capital in order to increase the productivity and efficiency of employees. A distinction can be made between general and specific human capital. General human capital refers to the knowledge and skills that individuals obtain through formal education and work experience and that is applicable to more than one job or firm (Becker, 1993). The knowledge that individuals obtain through work experience is as valuable as education (Becker, 1993). Specific human capital refers to the knowledge and skills acquired on the job that are not easily used within other firms and industries (Becker, 1993). With time, human capital depreciates automatically in terms of physical capacities and knowledge that gets older. However, organizations can take measures to compensate for this depreciation, by providing training for example (Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000). The human capital theory also predicts that human capital investments are lower for older employees than for their younger colleagues. This is because the time horizon is shorter. In other words, the period to recuperate the costs of such investments is shorter, leading to a lower return on investment (Neumann & Weiss, 1995). This theoretical framework suggests that organizations might be less willing to invest in older employees because their return on investment will be lower, but also that organizations can invest in human capital in order to increase the employability of older employees. Lots of research has been done on this theory in the recent decades. This theory has been criticized based on the differences between men and women and because it considers human beings as a

material things (Coleman, 2007; Faruk Abdullah, 2012). Since human beings are social creatures, investment in it does not assure the same ratio of production in return like a machine.

3.1.5 Theoretical framework: The social exchange theory

The theoretical framework used in this thesis is the social exchange theory. A distinction can be made between social and economic exchange. Social exchange can be differentiated from an economic exchange along the following dimensions: resources exchanged, type and strength of obligations, reciprocity and the quality of the relationship that develops over time (Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen & Tetrick, 2009). Both social and economic exchange involve the exchange of economic resources, but social exchange also involves socio-emotional resources (Shore, Tetrick, Lynch & Barksdale, 2006), indicating a broader investment in the relationship. In relationships involving social exchange, the beneficial exchanges between parties are not negotiated (Molm, 2003), and consequently, the nature and timing of the return remains unspecified (Blau, 1964). Both social exchange partners invest in the other party knowing there is some risk that the investment will not be returned, requiring trust that the other party will reciprocate and an ongoing cycle of beneficial exchanges will occur (Blau, 1964). This requires a long-term orientation, since the exchange is ongoing, and necessitates time for the investment in the relationship to yield valuable returns.

In economic exchanges, the respective obligations are specified, and the parties are confident that each party will fulfill his/her obligations based on societal norms of economic exchange between employee and employer, a verbally negotiated arrangement, or a formal contract, which also dictates the duration of the relationship (Blau, 1964). Economic exchange neither requires employees' trust and investment in their organization (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003) nor entails the norm of reciprocity and open-ended obligations as required under organizational social exchange (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Economic exchange is impersonal and does not entail investment in the relationship by either the employee or the organization. It only reflects the basic expectations in employment relationships, such as a fair day's pay for a fair day's work (Loi, Mao & Ngo, 2009). In brief, economic exchange reflects the exchange of tangible resources over a finite period or a discrete transaction. The fulfillment of an economic exchange is vital to the continuation of the relationship, while social exchange relationships are characterized by a long-term orientation, the

exchange of both tangible and intangible resources, as well as trust, commitment, and attachment (Emerson, 1981).

Empirical findings suggest that social and economic exchanges are distinct and relate differently to organizational outcomes such as commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors and performance (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003; Shore et al, 2006; Song et al, 2009).

This thesis will focus on social exchange, since factors like respect and recognition are also taken into account. Furthermore, this theory argues that employees form general perceptions about the intentions and attitudes of the organization toward them in the form of policies and practices, which leads them to create a relationship with their employer that is parallel to the relationships individuals build with each other. Here, the view is that employees treat the organization with human-like characteristics (Levinson, 1965) and that an individual employee and the organization can enter into a social exchange relationship. Simply stated, employees will reciprocate the care and valuable treatment they receive from the organization in the form of positive work outcomes such as affective organizational commitment (Setton, Bennett & Liden, 1996).

Each party acts according to the norm that the other party will reciprocate their actions, creating mutual obligations over time. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002) have provided empirical support for the norm of reciprocity in exchange relationships from both the perspective of employees as well as managers and employer representatives. If one party does not reciprocate, an imbalance is created between the contributions of the two parties (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which can be restored by behaving in an unfavorable way.

However, it is important to note that this norm of reciprocity is often thought as giving and taking in equivalent measure. Although giving and taking are colloquially assumed to be equivalent actions, Keysar and co-workers (2008) have demonstrated that there are different patterns of reciprocity. They showed that social exchange is based largely on the meaning of social actions, rather than on the objective value of those actions. Positive actions of giving are reciprocated in comparable measure, whereas negative actions of taking are reciprocated more selfishly. In other words, reciprocity appears to operate on an exchange rate that assigns value to the meaning of events, in a fashion that encourages pro-social exchanges (Keysar, Converse, Wang & Epley, 2008).

It has been found in previous studies that a lack of reciprocity can lead to lowering their trust or commitment (Taylor & Tekleab, 2004). For example, when an employee perceives breach of the psychological contract in that the organization does not give anything in return after an employee has worked overtime for example, an employee's commitment goes down (Tekleab, Takeuchi & Taylor, 2005).

Shore, Bommer, Rao and Seo (2009) examined the relationships that social and economic exchanges had with affective commitment, turnover intentions, employer trust, and altruism. The results of this study are generally consistent with social exchange theory arguments (Blau, 1964), and prior empirical research (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003; Shore et al, 2006) that social exchange is related to positive employee attitudes and behaviors. Economic exchange had independent and negative effects on affective commitment and turnover intentions.

Until now the social exchange theory has been discussed in a general way. However, different forms of this theory with different foci can be identified. Tekleab and Chiaburu (2010) examined differences in social exchange form and focus and found that each form of social exchange brings a different perspective on how employees construe their relationships with their organizations and direct supervisors. The dimensions under study were psychological contracts, perceived organizational support, trust in the organization, with the direct supervisor (leader-member exchange) and trust in the supervisor. Previous studies examining these forms of social exchange have shown that they are conceptually related and are consistently predicting similar work attitudes and behaviors (Aryee & Chen, 2006; Aryee et al, 2002; Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005). This thesis has chosen not to focus on a certain form of the social exchange theory and use this theory in a global way.

Another distinction can be made between process and content models of exchange relationships. Most empirical attention has been given to the content of what is exchanged between employee(s) and employers – the resources that each party contributes to the relationship (Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen & Tetrick, 2009). The mutual investment employment relationship is related to higher commitment, lower turnover intentions, higher job performance, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) (Hom et al, 2009; Song et al, 2009). However, exchange relationships are more complex than the resources exchanged, and this has stimulated studies that have focused more on the process (Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen & Tetrick, 2009). As stated by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) when describing

exchange processes, 'The process begins when at least one participant makes a "move," and if the other reciprocates, new rounds of exchange initiate. Once the process is in motion, each consequence can create a self-reinforcing cycle. The sequence is likely to be continuous, making it difficult to organize into discrete steps.' While content models assume an antecedent and outcome in exchange – typically organizational inducements for employee contributions – process models assume an ongoing and interdependent exchange in which both parties make contributions in a non-sequential manner that reflects the tenor of the relationship (Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen & Tetrick, 2009). Sahlins (1972) outlined three types of reciprocity, generalized, balanced, and negative, based on the dimensions of immediacy and equivalence of returns and the degree and interest of each party in the exchange. Together, these studies direct attention to exchange processes underlying relationships in terms of balance, nature, and reciprocity and how these are associated with relationship quality, rather than focusing on the content of the exchange per se.

Psychological contract is related to the social exchange theory and can be defined as a person's perception and expectations about the shared duty in an employment exchange relationship (Rousseau, 1990). Each individual holds his different perception of mutual obligation under the contract (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau 1994). Psychological contracts define the terms of the social exchange relationship (Blau, 1964) that exists between individuals and their organizations. Literature suggests that employees seek to maintain equity between the costs and benefits of such relationships (Adams, 1965). Thus, employees who experience psychological contract violations will, in turn, decrease the contributions that they make to their organizations. A psychological contract breach captures employees' perceptions of the extent to which the employer has failed to fulfill one or more of its obligations (Conway & Briner, 2005). The beauty of the concept is "in the simple idea that breach has a straightforward negative relationship with outcomes" (Conway & Briner, 2009). Empirical studies have demonstrated the downward adjustments in various employee emotions, attitudes and behaviours, including organizational commitment (Lester et al., 2002; Sturges et al, 2005), increased turnover (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004 ; Sutton & Griffin, 2004), reduced organizational citizenship behaviors and in-role behaviors (Hui et al, 2004; Turnley et al, 2003), and increased deviant behaviors (Kickul, 2001) following the experience of breach.

The core dimensions of the psychological contract are defined as relational

and transactional (Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). The relational aspect refers to the long-term obligations of both parties, such as job security, or opportunities for development on the part of the employer and loyalty and work satisfaction on the part of the employee (Kramer et al, 2005; Sutton & Griffin, 2004; Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999; McDonald & Makin, 1999). It may be based on the exchange of socio-emotional elements such as commitment (Lemire & Rouillard, 2005). The transactional feature relates to the short-term, specific and limited obligations of the parties in terms of monetary payments by the employer in exchange for effort or services rendered by the employee (Maguire, 2002; Rousseau, 1990). Although both components are present in a psychological contract, the extent of each varies according to the type of employment relationship and determines the nature of the contract.

Psychological contracts and perceived organizational support have typically examined the content of the exchange, capturing what is exchanged and how much is exchanged. Social and economic exchange and reciprocity have focused on the process of the exchange by examining how both parties contribute to the exchange relationship through the quality and nature of resources provided (Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen & Tetrick, 2009).

3.1.6 Application of theoretical framework

This section will explain how social exchange theory applies to the present study. This study tries to explain the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices on the one hand and job performance, commitment and the preference for early retirement on the other hand by using the principles underlying social exchange theory.

According to social exchange theory, an organization that provides certain HR practices gives a signal to its employees that it wants to continue a social exchange relationship (Allen et al, 2003; Appelbaum et al, 2000; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), supports them (Tremblay & Roger, 2004) and is still committed to them (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000) which should encourage employees to reciprocate in a positive manner, since it positively influences their perception and attitudes towards the organization where they work. Their perception of the relationship they have with their organization influences their attitudes (Arthur, 1994). These attitudes do in turn affect their behavior by reciprocating the treatment they receive from their organization (Eisenberger et al, 1990). This positive

reaction can take many forms (Lavelle, Rupp & Brockner, 2007) like affective commitment (Shore & Tetrick, 1991), job performance (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001) and the extension of one's working life (Chen et al, 2004).

In line with this theory it is expected that employees will reciprocate a positive perception of the quality of HR practices with high affective commitment which, in turn, will enhance performance (Shore et al, 2006) or by reciprocating directly by expressing higher job performance (Bunderson, 2001; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson, 1996; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). HR practices are seen as a form of organizational support (Allen et al, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), which is perceived by employees as a form of commitment to them (Eisenberger et al, 1990; Settoon et al, 1996). They feel valued, supported and fairly treated (Allen et al, 2003), trusted (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994), important and competent (Meyer & Allen, 1991), fulfilling basic needs as approval and respect (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In accordance with the social exchange theory, the provision of HR practices leads to a positive perception and increases therefore their affective organizational commitment, their motivation and feelings of obligation to work hard (Lee & Bruvold, 2003).

Psychological contract fulfillment is one form of social exchange and has also been found to be associated with desirable behavioral and organizational outcomes (Turnley & Feldman, 2000). A positive perception of the quality of certain HR practices leads to a fulfillment of psychological contract (Sturges et al, 2005), where as long as an organization is able to fulfill an employee's expectations regarding their needs and wishes the employee will reciprocate by showing for example greater commitment and a weaker preference for early retirement (Chen et al, 2004).

Older employees need to be considered as a distinctive group of employees when considering social exchange theory, because they have specific interests. Sullivan et al. (2003) have argued that three factors have to be taken into account in the social exchange theory: equivalence, immediacy, and interest. First of all, both parties in the exchange relationship have to view what they give and receive as equivalent (Sullivan et al, 2003). Secondly, behaviors should be reciprocated within a certain time frame (Sullivan et al, 2003). The amount of time between the receipt of an exchange and when reciprocation occurs influences the relationship. For older employees this time frame is shorter, because they have less time left at the organization. Therefore, several actions on behalf of the organization, like promotions for example, should be given quite quickly. Lastly, it might well be that

actions on the side of the organization valued by younger employees are not appreciated by older employees, which would mean that there is no interest (Sullivan et al, 2003). This influences the way older employees react to the provision of HR practices in terms of their commitment, their performance and their preference for early retirement.

3.2 Research gaps and contributions

This study will examine the influence of the perception of older employees regarding the quality of several HR practices, namely flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation and recognition and respect. It will examine how older employees' perception of the quality of those HR practices influences their commitment, job performance and the preference for early retirement. Although HR practices have been studied before, this study makes a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in several ways.

First, this study makes a contribution by focusing on older employees with an *average low occupational status* instead of the focus on older employees with a high occupational status. Research so far has focused mostly on older employees with a high occupational status (Armstrong-Stassen & Templer, 2005; Mantzana, Themistocleous & Morabito, 2010). Most of them looked at the perception of managers (Gibson & Barron, 2003; Herrbach, Mignonac, Vandenberghe & Negrini, 2009; Thun, Grossler & Miczka, 2007). However, it has been argued that not taking into account the perception of employees with a lower occupational status is likely to lead to skewed findings (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Lau & Ngo, 2004, Truss, 2001). There is no reason to suppose that employees with different occupational statuses have the same needs. Although it is generally assumed that HR policies will be implemented as intended and have the same effect on all employees who work for an organization, various authors have questioned these assumptions because of the differences between intended HR policies and employees' experience (Paul & Anantharaman, 2003; Purcell et al, 2003; Wright & Boswell, 2002) and because complex organizations have different types of employees who do not have the same needs in terms of HR practices and policies (Lepak & Snell, 1999; 2002; Marchington & Grugulis, 2000; Melian-Gonzalez & Verano-Tacorante, 2004; Purcell, 1999; Wright & Boswell, 2002). Since the workforce in the creative industry in the Netherlands is highly heterogeneous, the approach that assumes the invariability of HR policy across the organization can be seen as 'naive and

detrimental to the development of the field' (Wright & Boswell, 2002). Marchington and Grugulis (2000) note that 'so much depends on the categories of staff'. Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton and Swart (2005) examined the links between employees' satisfaction with HR practices and their commitment to the organization for three groups of employees in the UK: professionals, line managers and workers. They found that there are three variables that are associated with the commitment of all employee groups: rewards and recognition, communication and work-life balance, but that there were also big differences between the three groups of employees. Pillay, Kelly and Tones (2006; 2010) also looked at blue-collar older employees in Australia. However, these studies have focused on transitional employment aspirations and training and development needs of older workers. This thesis does not only look at training and development, but also looks at other HR practices and takes into account commitment and job performance.

Secondly, this thesis looks at perceived quality of HR practices as perceived by *employees*. Very few studies have collected data directly from the employees (Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayto, & Swart, 2005). As Wright and Boswell (2002) have argued, "any research attempting to demonstrate a relationship between HRM and firm performance stands on firmer ground when assessing the actual practices rather than the intended policies. This may imply that asking senior executives to indicate practices has less validity than asking employees themselves". However, HR practices perceived or experienced by employees will be those delivered or enacted by line managers (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Employees are likely to be influenced both by the HR practices they experience and by their managers' leadership behaviour. Poorly designed or inadequate policies can be 'rescued' by good management behaviour in much the same way as 'good' HR practices can be negated by poor front-line manager behaviour or weak leadership. Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) found that there is a form of symbiotic relationship between front-line managers and HR practices. HR practices, to be successfully applied and to have positive relationships with for example commitment and job performance, need effective front-line managers. Although it is important to recognize this, it has been argued that HR practices have similar effects on commitment and job performance if rated highly by employees (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Thirdly, this study looks at *perceived* instead of actual or intended HR practices. As Wright and Nishii (2007) note, not the HR practices as intended in policy documents but rather how employees experience HR practices, to what extent

employees feel that the HR practices the organization implements are indeed offered to them, will affect employees. They state that differences between actual and perceived HR practices can occur due to differences in actual practices offered to employees and due to differences in individual perceptions and interpretations of the same actually offered practices (Wright & Nishii, 2007). Thus, the way employees perceive practices may affect the outcomes.

Furthermore, the mix of HR practices investigated here is unique. This study focuses on flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation and recognition and respect. The choice for these HR practices is based on the outcomes of the exploratory qualitative study of this thesis that examined which HR practices are important for older employees. As such, the quantitative study of this thesis builds on the results of the qualitative part of this thesis.

Although many HR practices have been linked to either commitment, job performance or the retirement decision, the findings of these studies are often contradictory. The relationship between the perception of the quality of HR practices an organization has in place and the preference for early retirement has produced inconsistent results for the HR practices related to job design (Chew & Chan, 2008; Warr, 2001) and training (Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009; Saba & Guerin, 2005; Schils, 2005). In addition, the HR practices related to performance evaluation have never been studied in relationship with a preference for early retirement. Furthermore, research regarding the relationship between perceived HR practices and organizational commitment has produced contradictory results.

This study adopts Allen and Meyer's (1990) multidimensional approach of organizational commitment stating that organizational commitment contains three components of commitment: normative, affective and continuance commitment. Their model is one of the most empirically tested models (Stallworth, 2003). Normative commitment (an employee's feelings of obligation to remain with the organization) was not included in the study because there is less support for this commitment dimension in the literature (Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999) and because previous researchers have argued that affective and continuance organizational commitment are more important to older employees (Herrbach et al., 2009). Affective commitment is defined as employees' attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Continuance commitment is defined as commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Although some researchers

argue that this component should be split into two dimensions, high sacrifice and lack of alternatives (Culpepper, 2000), this study does not make this distinction, since the two components of continuance commitment have been studied previously in a sample with older employees (Herrbach et al, 2009). The three components of organizational commitment are experienced by the same individual to different degrees (Stallworth, 2003) and is the result of several influences like individual, organizational or societal characteristics and can change over time.

Most studies have shown that HR practices are positively related to employees' organizational commitment (Allen et al, 2003; Gould-Williams, 2003; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Whitener, 2001; Zacharatos, Hershcovis, Turner & Barling, 2007), although some researchers have argued that HR practices do not have a positive influence on organizational commitment (Fiorito, Bozeman, Young & Meurs, 2007). Job performance refers to how well each employee performed the duties of his/her job (Ibrahim, Al Sejini & Al Qassimi, 2004). This thesis has used a meta-perspective of job performance in order to decrease the socially desirability bias that is present in self-rated job performance. Since it was impossible to obtain actual figures of job performance from the employers, this study has asked respondents to rate their supervisor's assessment of their performance. Schoorman and Mayer (2008) have argued that one should ask respondents for their supervisor's assessment of their performance rather than for their own assessment in order to overcome the socially desirability bias, without asking for actual figures of job performance of the organization.

The inconclusive results obtained by previous studies on the factors under study ask for more research. As such, more research on older employees, their commitment, performance and the factors that influence their retirement decision can be justified. We will now turn to an overview of the relevant literature and the development of the research issues and hypotheses.

3.3 Research issues and hypotheses

This thesis uses a mixed-methods approach, having both research issues and hypotheses. Research issue 2, 3 and 4 examine the same phenomena as the hypotheses in the quantitative study in a different way. The same issues are thus looked at from a different angle and different aspects and facets of the same topic are looked at in more detail in the qualitative study, providing explanations and adding breadth. Research issue 1 and 5 explore issues that are not tested by the use of

hypotheses in the quantitative study. The table below shows which research issues overlap with hypotheses and which do not.

Table 3.1: Overlap research issues and hypotheses

Topic	Research issue	Hypothesis
How do older employees experience the world of work	1	None
Perceived HR practices	2	1
Commitment	3	3
Job performance	4	2
Factors influencing retirement decision	5	None

The first research issue aims to start the interview in a non-threatening way. It aims to get insights into the issues related to older employees nowadays that were not thought of so far.

The second research issue relates to hypothesis 1 in the quantitative study. Although relationships are not investigated as is the case for the hypotheses, research issue 2 aims to get a full idea of how older employees perceive the HR practices at their organisation. The HR practices mentioned by the interviewees were used to design the quantitative study.

The third research issue relates to hypotheses 3a and 3b, but again instead of testing a relationship it aims to obtain in-depth information on how older employees describe their own commitment to their organization and occupation. The same is true for research issue 4, this time linked to hypothesis 2, aiming to get more in-depth information on the job performance of older employees.

The last research issue is unrelated to the hypotheses in the quantitative study. In order to obtain a more complete picture about the retirement decision, this last research issue will investigate which other factors influence this decision.

3.4 Research issue 1

The first research issue discussed in the qualitative study of this thesis is a general question in order to get a feel for the issues older employees experience at the workplace. This first research issue includes everything older employees want to tell about their working lives, the way they are being treated, their needs, wishes, ways of working and any other experiences or notes. This research issue was included to inform the researcher about all aspects of how it is to be an older employee with an average low occupational status nowadays. Since the qualitative study was conducted before the quantitative study, this issue aimed at identifying all important aspects and

helped to build the quantitative survey. Although this survey is build on the literature review also, I wanted to make sure that I did not overlook some important issues for the particular population under study and that is why this first research issue has been included.

Research issue 1: How do older employees experience the world of work today?

3.5 Research issue 2 and hypothesis 1

The perception of the quality of HR practices refers to how one perceives the provision of HR practices (positive-negative continuum). HR practices are seen and used as a tool to influence the retirement decision of employees. In the exploratory qualitative study it was asked which HR practices were most widely available and which HR practices were most desired. Based on their answers the following HR practices were identified and were examined in more detail in the quantitative study of this thesis: flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation, and recognition and respect.

3.5.1 Flexible work options

Several studies have shown that flexible work options are a priority for older employees and the key to their continued participation in an organization (Piotr, 2009; Warren & Kelloway, 2010; Winkelmann-Gleed, 2012). Although a majority of older workers plan to extend their work life, many of them wish to move away from the standard nine-to-five, five-day work week (Pitt-Catsoupes & Smyer, 2006), stating that they desire flexible work arrangements and reduced hours (Hedge, Borman & Lammlein, 2006; Warren & Kelloway, 2010; Winkelmann-Gleed, 2012).

In the present study, the four HR practices regarding flexible work options are flexible work schedules (days/hours worked), a reduced work week (part-time), job sharing (two people sharing a full-time position) and options to work from home, which is similar to the four practices identified by Koc-Menard (2009), namely work schedules, number of hours at work, work location and job responsibilities. He recommends to combine and integrate diverse dimensions of work flexibility and to offer these to retired employees by aligning flexible work opportunities with pension scheme options.

However, both employers and employees have a reserved attitude towards flexible work options. Employers have concerns about the costs, practical

implementation problems and additional administration efforts, while employees are reluctant to take this option because of issues like loss of income and/or status and new workloads due to organizational changes (Anderson & Kelliher, 2009). As a rule, however, these reservations can be overcome by means of a careful and participatory approach to implementing such measures (Naegelé & Walker, 2006). Several best practices regarding the implementation of flexible work options have been identified. First of all, it should be clear that flexible working is available to everyone. Secondly, flexible workers should not have a disadvantage regarding promotion decisions. Thirdly, guidance for employees with flexible work options should be provided as well as training sessions for managers.

Offering flexible work options to older employees can lead to positive outcomes for organizations. Benefits such as lower overhead costs from reduced office space requirements, improvements in quality performance (Dex et al, 2001), greater operational and numerical flexibility (Branine, 2003) and higher levels of organizational commitment among employees (Anderson & Kelliher, 2009) have been identified. Flexible working time is an important instrument for ‘humanizing’ working life, particularly in demanding activities such as night shift work, a common characteristic of the creative industry. Lower numbers of early retirements and incapacity pensions have also resulted from flexible work practices (Naegelé & Walker, 2006).

3.5.2 Job design

Job design, the nature of work, has found to be an important predictor of employees’ preference for early retirement (Beehr 1986; Hanish & Hulin, 1990; Taylor & Shore, 1995). In this study the aspects of the job that are of particular interest in this study are challenging and meaningful assignments/special projects, new roles for older employees, opportunities to transfer to a less stressful/strenuous job and the provision of a career plan.

Regarding the opportunity to transfer to a less stressful or strenuous job, several studies have shown that stressful working conditions with heavy workloads are associated with higher intentions to retire early (Herzog, House & Morgan, 1991; Lin & Hsieh, 2001). Since physical capacities can decline as one ages, older employees are likely to appreciate opportunities to adjust their workload. If an organization lacks provisions or policies that provide opportunities to do so, older employees may be inclined to retire early (Warr, 2001).

Evidence suggests that the opportunity for older employees to engage in interesting tasks, job transitions, and development activities is limited (Van der Heijden, 2006; Warr, 2001), because there is a common belief in organizations that older workers want to retire as soon as possible (Finkelstein & Burke, 1998; Henkens, 2000).

Employees who considered their work as little challenge have reported a stronger intention to retire early (Pil & Macduffie, 1996; Udo et al, 1997; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2002; Workman & Bommer, 2004). For example, employees who provide technical assistance to customers via the telephone to solve computer hardware and software problems often have poor job attitudes (Wallace, Eagleson & Waldersee, 2000). The simultaneous demand for technical and customer service skills frequently leads to poor job attitudes, like job dissatisfaction (Warr, Cook & Wall, 1979), low affective organizational commitment (McCaul, Hinsz & McCaul, 1995) and the wish to retire early (Workman & Bommer, 2004). A little challenging job is a job that is repetitive in nature (Wallace, Eagleson & Waldersee, 2000), is low on skill variety, task identity, task significance and job autonomy (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Skill variety refers to the opportunity to utilize a variety of valued skills and talents on the job, task identity is the extent to which a job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work, task significance reflects the extent to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people and job autonomy is the extent to which the job provides freedom, independence, and discretion in scheduling work and determining procedures that the job provides. Some studies found positive relationships between early retirement intentions and perceptions of low autonomy and skill variety (Saleh & Desai, 1990), but other studies did not find such a relationship (Beehr et al, 2000).

Other researchers have failed to find a relationship between job design and a preference for early retirement altogether (Chew & Chan, 2008). Chew and Chan (2008) examined the impacts of key HR practices, like challenging assignments, on permanent employees' organizational commitment and intention to stay in various Australian organizations. In contrast with previous studies, they found that an employee's intention to stay is not significantly affected by the degree of challenge provided by the assignment. The non-significant association between opportunities to work on challenging assignments and intention to stay is surprising because Ferguson (1990) argues that companies integrate succession planning to provide a sense of growth for employees. Thus, one possible explanation for the non-

significant finding is that there is a lack of succession planning in place. Another plausible explanation is that succession planning is normally applicable to upper level management and the sample used in the study of Chew and Chan (2008) is heterogeneous in the sense that respondents had various professions and belonged to various organizational levels.

Assuming that organizations do properly match the type of tasks or jobs according to the needs and skills of employees, this study expects to find a negative relationship between a positive perception of the quality of job design and the preference to retire before the legal retirement age.

3.5.3 Training

In this study the following aspects of the HR practice ‘training’ will be investigated: training for older employees to update their job skills, training for older employees to acquire new skills, the provision of access to new technology that will assist older employees in performing their job and the provision of the same opportunities as younger employees to be promoted or transferred.

Evidence has shown that training for older employees postpones the retirement decision (Schils, 2005). However, participation in training programs usually decreases with age, since older employees have less access to training (Hedge et al, 2004; Lazarra & Bombelli, 2011; Taylor & Urwin, 2001; Villosio et al, 2008), with employees over 50 hardly participating (Bassanini et al, 2005). This is the case in the Netherlands (Van der Heijden, 2006; Van Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008). Among the group aged 50–64 years of age, 12% of employees said to have had training opportunities (Labour Force Survey data presented in OECD; 2005). However, age seems to be positively related to the willingness to take training opportunities (Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008), since many 55-plus professionals actively look for opportunities to expand their knowledge horizons (Armstrong-Stassen & Templer, 2005).

Fouarge and Schils (2009) examined the effect of early retirement incentives on the training participation of older workers by using data from the ECHP, the European Community Household Panel, from the period 1994-2001 in different European countries. The standard prediction from human capital theory is that older workers are less likely to be involved in on-the-job training than younger workers. This is because of the expected lower net returns of such investments for organizations (Neumann & Weiss, 1995). Additionally, institutions favoring early

retirement shorten the payback period of human capital investments, in particular that of older employees (Lau & Poutvaara, 2006). Recently, governments have started to reform pension systems, making early retirement less attractive financially. Furthermore, other measures have been introduced aimed at increasing the skills of the older workforce (Fouarge & Schils, 2009). The human capital theory predicts that investments in human capital are a way to increase productivity and thereby to enhance job employment, and income security. Previous empirical studies showed that participation in on-the-job training compensates for the depreciation of human capital and increases the employability of employees (Bishop, 1997; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000). In other words, the provision of training is likely to increase the employability of older employees. Fouarge and Schils (2009) found that older employees do indeed participate less in training than younger employees. They also found that training participation and formal education are complementary, in the sense that the likelihood of following training increases with education level. However, this complementarity only holds for younger employees (aged below 45). For older employees it appears to be the case that especially those with a low educational level are likely to follow training: they seem to engage in a compensating strategy whereby training makes up for their lack of formal education (Fouarge & Schils, 2009). So in this study it seems that older employees go against the general trend, although this depends on the country and the type of pension scheme. The difference between older and younger employees is significantly smaller in countries with a well-established tradition of lifelong learning, such as Denmark and Finland. These countries are also characterized as having a more flexible early retirement system, in which there is more freedom of choice as to the age at which to retire, yet with rather modest replacement incomes. It therefore seems that in such systems, the older employee and the employer are more willing to invest in training because they expect larger returns. In other early retirement systems that are characterized as more generous, as is the case in the Netherlands, training is lower.

Farr, Tesluk and Klein (1998) showed that organizational policies often do not encourage older employees to engage in training and development activities to update or acquire knowledge and skills. It is often assumed that older employees are simply waiting to retire and that they do not desire a job that requires upgrading their skills and abilities (Boerlijst & Van der Heijden, 2003; Goldberg, 2000), although skill obsolescence is an issue among older employees (Charness & Czaja, 2006).

Several studies have shown that managers believe that older employees show resistance to training (Capowski, 1994), they are less ready to accept the introduction of new technology (Warr & Pennington, 1993), are less interested in being trained (Warr, 1994) and have advanced as far as they want in their careers and are not interested in further advancement (Patrickson & Ranzijn, 2005). However, research has shown that competency development is negatively and directly related to turnover intentions (Paré & Tremblay, 2007) and that employees who perceive higher levels of career growth opportunity extend their careers more (Saba & Guerin, 2005; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2002). Taking on the role of trainer or being assigned to special projects can give older managers a sense of fulfillment in their professional life, allowing them to work in a pleasant environment which recognizes their experience and competencies, leading them to retire at a later age (Saba & Guerin, 2005).

Other studies have found that perceived organizational support mediates the negative relationship between perceived training opportunities and a preference for early retirement (Allen et al, 2003; Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009). Perceived organizational support reflects employees' general beliefs that their organization values their continued membership, is committed to them, and is concerned about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). According to the norm of reciprocity, one way employees who experience greater support from their organization repay the organization for its support is by remaining in the organization (Allen et al, 2003). Previous research has found a strong positive relationship between perceived organizational support and intention to remain in the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In the same line, Van Vianen, Dalhoeven and De Pater (2011) found that the relationship between age and training and development willingness is moderated by employees' entity self-theory and perceived developmental support as well as supervisors' beliefs about the avoidance orientations of older employees. Self-theories are beliefs about the fixedness or malleability of personal characteristics (Dweck, 2000). Individuals who adhere to an entity theory assume that personal attributes such as intelligence and personality are fixed. People's implicit self-theories form the core of their meaning system and direct their attributions and actions (Dweck, 2000). In addition, self-theories orient people to different goals with incremental theorists placing more priority on learning than entity theorists (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999). It was shown that entity self-theory beliefs, perceived developmental support, and supervisor avoidance

orientation beliefs were related to the training and development willingness of older subordinates (Van Vianen, Dalhoeven & De Pater, 2011).

Occupational status also seems to play an important role in the relationship between training and the retirement decision. Pillay, Kelly and Tones (2010) tried to identify the training and development needs of older and younger employees at risk of early retirement due to limited education and/or employment in blue-collar occupations. They found that older blue collar employees and secondary school-educated employees are less interested in training than older employees with higher levels of education or from white-collar backgrounds. Blue collar employees have lower job security and pay compared to professionals and managers (Millward & Brooke, 2007), which might influence their interest in training opportunities. It might be that older employees with a low occupational status are more interested in reducing physically demanding work (Pillay et al, 2006), since they experience more stress and illness due to work, compared to professionals and managers (Buyens et al, 2009). Millward & Brooke (2007) found that employees with a lower level of formal education or occupational status were interested in continuing work provided that their physical health was good, and they earned a “decent” income. By contrast, employees with a university level of education or high-occupational status were encouraged to remain within the workforce if they felt valued or challenged.

Findings from the European Working Conditions survey (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2008) indicate that employees from low-skilled occupations report fewer training needs and opportunities for personal growth in the jobs compared to workers in highly skilled occupations. The report also notes that the limited training and development opportunities offered by their employers prevent employees from development and career advancement in their work (Yrjanainen, 2008). In addition, many low-skilled jobs consist of manually demanding work in potentially hazardous environments that pose a risk to physical health, and contribute to subsequent early retirement (Ilmarinen, 2006).

According to Loretto and White (2006), negative stereotyping and age discrimination serve as one of the main barriers for older employees seeking to access training and development opportunities. On the other hand, training was found to be the most widespread policy for dealing with age discrimination (Lazarra & Bombelli, 2011). However, age related constraints to training and development are compounded by low-occupational status, such that older employees of low-

occupational status with limited formal qualifications experience greater disadvantage compared to older employees with higher levels of education or occupational status.

Despite the average low occupational status of the participants, this study will investigate if a positive perception of the quality of training opportunities has a negative relationship with the preference for early retirement, which would be in line with most previous studies.

3.5.4 Performance evaluation

It has been argued that performance appraisal is among the most important HR practices (Boswell & Boudreau, 2002, Keeping & Levy, 2000), but it has received relatively little attention from researchers compared to other HR practices like training.

Performance appraisal covers a variety of activities through which organizations seek to assess employees and develop their competence, enhance performance and distribute rewards (Fletcher, 2001), moving away from a narrow focus on psychometric and evaluation issues (Fletcher, 2001; Levy & Williams, 2004). In this study, performance evaluation has been measured by the following items: fair performance appraisals (free from age bias), the provision of useful feedback about the job performance of older employees and feedback after having received some training.

Performance appraisal is the most studied area of performance evaluation. Performance appraisals are important to employees, not only because they are rewarded in accordance with this appraisal, but also because it reflects their success or failure, thereby affecting employees' intrinsic values, such as their self-esteem and self-confidence (Kaplan & Atkinson 1998). Their perception of the quality of this HR practice is therefore important (Banker et al, 2004). Linked to this idea that performance evaluations affect employees' self-esteem (Kaplan & Atkinson 1998), it has been argued that employees have to experience positive appraisal reactions if it is designed to have a positive effect on the future behavior of the employee and that a negative perception has a positive relationship with withdrawal intentions (Poon, 2004).

A second argument is that performance evaluation takes time and that the time invested by the organization into the performance evaluation is appreciated by older employees. However, Grund and Sliwka (2009) found that in German firms the

performance of older employees is evaluated less often than the performance of employees of other ages. They investigated the use of performance appraisal in German firms in a broad range of industries, ranging from agriculture, to manufacturing, financial services or construction. Also, the size of the firms varied as well as the occupational level of the employees and the managers.

Recognizing the importance of performance appraisals and the reflection of their functioning, it is expected that the time and attention on the side of the organization put in this HR practice is valued by the older employee in such a way that it enhances the intention to continue working.

3.5.5 Recognition and respect

A simple factor that is often overlooked when studying the motivation and retention of older employees is recognition and respect.

Research indicates that older employees respond strongly to intrinsic rewards like feelings of usefulness and being valued, the recognition they get from managers for a job well done and the feeling that they are important to the organization (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Valentine, Valentine & Dick, 1998).

The HR practice recognition and respect includes recognizing the experience, knowledge, skill and expertise of older employees, ensuring that older employees are treated with respect by others in the organization and showing appreciation for a job well done. These factors can influence an employee's retirement decision. Research has shown that a lack of recognition and respect can be linked to a preference for early retirement (Davies, 2001; Mercer Report, 2003) and that a challenging and rewarding work environment where the older employee is recognized has a negative relationship with a preference for early retirement (Chew & Chan, 2008; Pré & Tremblay, 2007; Van Dam, van der Vorst & van der Heijden, 2009).

Assuming that older employees indeed respond strongly to intrinsic rewards like being valued and recognized, this study will investigate if a positive perception of recognition and respect has a negative relationship with the preference for early retirement.

The quantitative part of this study looks at how the perception of the quality of HR practices relates to other variables. However, this only gives limited information about how older employees actually perceive the quality of HR practices that are provided (or not) in their organization. The way the older employees under study perceive the quality of HR practices, the reasoning behind their perception and

other useful comments they might make were tried to be captured by the qualitative part of this thesis. The second research issue tries to capture the diversity of the experiences of older employees related to their perception of HR practices.

Research issue 2: How do older employees perceive HR practices in their organization?

In this literature review, we will find the development as hypotheses, linked to the quantitative part of this study, as well as research issues, linked to the qualitative part of this study. A positive perception of the quality of HR practices by the older employees makes older employees want to extend their working lives and a continuation of the social relationship they have with their organizations, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived quality of HR practices has a negative relationship with the preference for early retirement: the more positive the perception of the quality of HR practices, the weaker the preference for early retirement.

3.6 Research issue 4 and hypothesis 2

The perception of the quality of HR practices refers to how one perceives the provision of HR practices (positive-negative continuum). HR practices have been linked to an improvement in job performance. Providing equitable remuneration that reflects performance (Boyd & Salamin, 2001; Parker & Wright, 2000), recognizing efforts and contributions made by individuals (Agarwal & Ferratt, 1999; Davies, 2001; Vlachos, 2008), providing employees with sufficiently challenging and interesting work (Kraut & Korman, 1999; Vlachos, 2008), providing opportunities for training and career development (Vlachos, 2008; Wetland, 2003), informal career management help (Sturges, Conway, Guest & Liefoghe, 2005), performance appraisals and regular feedback (Kuvaas, 2011; Pettijohn et al, 2001) and perceived organizational support (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) all seem to enhance job performance by shaping employees' attitudes and behaviors (Whitener, 2001).

A shorter working week seems to go together with better performance (Rosendaal, 2003). Employees that work part-time do not show less job satisfaction (Lee & Johnson, 1991), commitment, or productivity (Barling & Gallagher, 1996).

However, researchers have been stressing the need for more research into possible mediating variables regarding the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and job performance (Cappelli & Newman, 2001; Delery, 1998; Guest, 1997). Kuvaas (2008) found that affective organizational commitment moderated the relationship between perceived developmental HR practices and individual work performance. He also found that the relationship between performance appraisal satisfaction and work performance was both mediated and moderated by employees' intrinsic work motivation (Kuvaas, 2006).

In order to give an overview of the factors that have been found to influence job performance, a table below is provided.

Table 3.2: Factors influencing job performance

Factors	References
Shorter working week	Rosendaal, 2003
Equitable remuneration	Boyd & Salamin, 2001
Perceived organizational support	Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003
Challenging work	Vlachos, 2008
Intrinsic work motivation	Kuvaas, 2006
Training and career development	Wetland, 2003
Affective organizational commitment	Kuvaas, 2008
Recognition	Davies, 2001
Career management help	Sturges et al, 2005
Performance appraisal	Kuvaas, 2011

In line with previous studies I expect to find in my research a positive relationship between perceived quality of all HR practices and job performance. Although it might be that this relationship is indirect and mediated by other factors, there are many factors that might come into play here, so no hypothesis will be formulated regarding this possibility. The influence of those other factors can thus not be evaluated and is subject to future research. Research issue four aims to capture how older employees describe their job performance.

Research issue 4: How do older employees describe their job performance?

A positive perception of the quality of HR practices is seen as an inducement of the side of the organization. An older employee can reciprocate by enhancing his or her job performance, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived quality of HR practices has a positive relationship with job performance: the more positive the perception of the quality of HR practices, the better the job performance.

3.7 Research issue 3 and hypotheses 3a and 3b

Organizational commitment is a well-studied concept in the field of HR management (Bligh et al, 2006) and seems to have a positive relationship with many organizational and behavioral outcomes that organizations desire.

Previous research has identified four work commitment constructs: organizational commitment, occupational commitment, work centrality, and job involvement (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran 2005), which all can be linked in a different way to the retirement decision (Adams & Beehr, 1998; Schmidt & Lee, 2008). This study will only focus on affective and continuance organizational commitment. This study defines organizational commitment as a psychological stabilizing or obliging force that binds an individual to courses of action relevant to the target of that force (Bentein et al., 2005; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Research regarding the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and organizational commitment has produced contradictory results. Most studies have shown that HR practices are positively related to employees' organizational commitment (Allen et al, 2003; Gould-Williams, 2003; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Whitener, 2001; Zacharatos, Herscovis, Turner & Barling, 2007), although some researchers have argued that HR practices do not have a positive influence on organizational commitment (Fiorito, Bozeman, Young & Meurs, 2007). Researchers and human resource practitioners have mainly focused on affective organizational commitment, because of its association with desirable outcomes, such as reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover, and improved job performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999; Jaramillo et al., 2005). Organizations likely want to increase affective commitment, without increasing continuance commitment (Meyer & Smith, 2000).

It has been argued that HR practices influence the three components of commitment in different ways. HR practices are a form of perceived organizational

support, a concept that has been shown to have a positive relationship with organizational commitment (Chiang, Han & Chuang, 2011; Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001). HR practices have been shown to influence especially affective organizational commitment (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Chen, Lin, Lu & Tsao, 2007; Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). However, some researchers also found a positive relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and continuance commitment (McElroy, 2001; Meyer & Allen, 1997), arguing that employees perceive the loss of valuable HR practices as costly thereby enhancing this type of commitment.

As was the case for the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and job performance, some researchers have stressed the possible mediating effects of other variables. HR strength at the organizational level, defined as the extent to which management and individuals share the same perceptions of HR practices, was found to have a positive effect on the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and employee commitment. The more consistent the perception of the quality of HR practices between managers and employees, the greater the employee commitment to the organization (Chen, Lin, Lu & Tsao, 2007).

Another important concept that will come back in the discussion and conclusion chapter to explain some the findings is organizational justice. Regarding employees' perception of the quality of HR practices, their perception of organizational justice, referring to people's perceptions of fairness in organizations (Colquitt et al., 2005), seems to be important (Farndale, Hope-Hailey & Kelliher, 2011; Konovsky, 2000). Concerns about fairness in an organization are reflected in several facets of employees' working lives. For example, employees are concerned about the fairness of resource distributions, such as pay, rewards, promotions and the outcome of dispute resolutions. This is known as distributive justice (Colquitt et al., 2005). People also attend to the fairness of the decision-making procedures that lead to those outcomes, attempting to understand how and why they came about. This is referred to as procedural justice (Leventhal, 1980; Colquitt et al., 2005). Finally, individuals also are concerned with the nature of the interpersonal treatment received from others, especially key organizational authorities. This is called interactional justice (Greenberg, 1987; Colquitt et al., 2005). Collectively, distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice are considered forms of organizational justice, which we refer to here. It has been argued that a positive relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and organizational commitment only exists if the policies and practices of the organization are perceived as being fair

(Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Chang, 2002; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Farndale, Hope-Hailey & Kelliher, 2011) and are perceived as being the result of effective management policies and practices (Parker & Wright, 2000). For this reason it is important to keep this concept in mind when discussing the relationship between the perception of the quality of HR practices and commitment at a later stage in this thesis.

Furthermore, several studies have examined the influence of different HR practices on employees' organizational commitment. Koster (2011) found that both the intensity and the consistency of HR practices contribute to organizational commitment and work effort since they enhance the ability of employees and their willingness to cooperate and inform them about the expectations of the organization.

It has been argued that some HR practices are better at increasing employees' organizational commitment than others. Researchers have made a distinction between 'control' and 'commitment' HR practices. Control HR practices focus on increasing efficiency and reducing costs by implementing strict rules, while commitment HR practices try to motivate employees to work hard by increasing their commitment to the organization (Arthur, 1994). Chiang, Han and Chuang (2011) found that high-commitment human resource management was positively related to perceived organizational support. Perceived organizational support was positively associated with organizational trust and organizational commitment.

Many HR practices have been identified to have a positive influence on an employees' organizational commitment. Wright and Kehoe (2008) found that HR practices aiming at improving ability, increasing motivation, or providing opportunity to participate in decision-making were strongly linked to organizational commitment. Sturges and co-workers (2005) showed that informal career management help is associated with higher affective organizational commitment and has a positive impact on job performance. Other HR practices with a positive relationship with organizational commitment were trust, employee focus and communication (Watson & Papamarcos, 2002), career management help (Sturges, Guest, Conway & Mackenzie Davey, 2002), no-lay-off practices, employee stock ownership programs and performance-based pay (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000), empowerment (Kuvaas, 2006), the way messages were sent and a leadership style that engendered trust (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008).

It has been suggested that older employees have specific needs and wishes (Peterson & Spiker, 2005), but few studies have focused on this group of employees

(Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008; Kiefer & Briner, 1998; Maurer & Rafuse, 2001; Saba & Guerin, 2005). It is likely that the extent to which the HR practices fit the specific needs and wishes of older employees will influence their commitment (Peterson & Spiker, 2005). According to both the lifespan SOC, Selection, Optimization and Compensation, theory (Baltes, Staudinger & Lindenberger, 1999) and Regulatory Focus theory (Higgins, 1997), employee needs change with age. As such, certain HR practices fit best the needs of older employees. The SOC theory (Baltes et al, 1999) focuses on the maximization of gains and minimization of losses. Similarly, Regulatory Focus theory is concerned with how people achieve pleasure and avoid pain in different ways (Higgins, 1997).

Since older employees experience losses, for example in terms of skills and abilities, SOC theory argues that the allocation of resources aimed at growth (optimization) will decrease with age, whereas the allocation of resources used for maintenance and regulation of loss (compensation) will increase with age (Baltes et al, 1999), which has been supported by previous studies (Ebner, Freund & Baltes, 2006; Freund, 2006; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). As a result, the needs for self-actualization or growth are likely to decrease with age, whereas security needs are likely to increase as employees age, although others have identified career development as important to older employees (Maurer & Rafuse, 2001).

HR practices like flexible work options and job design relate to protection, safety, and responsibility that help individual employees to maintain their current levels of functioning in the face of new challenges. HR practices related to training and performance evaluation are related to advancement, growth, and accomplishment that help individual workers to achieve higher levels of functioning.

Based on social exchange and signaling theories, Kooij et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis and found that that particularly the maintenance HR practices of rewards, performance management, information sharing, teamwork, job content changes and flexible work schedules become increasingly important in achieving positive work-related attitudes as one ages. Since “rewards” also covers feelings of recognition, these findings are in line with recent studies that have found that feelings of recognition and fair performance appraisal are important for older employees (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Rau & Adams, 2005) as well as mentoring and teaching positions (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Furthermore, according to socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995), since older employees perceive their future time as more limited than younger employees, they give higher priority to

emotionally meaningful social interactions and goals (social needs), such as generativity, emotional intimacy, and social embeddedness (Lang & Carstensen, 2002), that result from working in teams. This also explains the importance of personal development (Meyer & Smith, 2000) found in previous studies.

Although many HR practices were found to have a positive relationship with organizational commitment, some studies have demonstrated that certain HR practices do not. Some studies found that the level of training (Igbaria & Wormley, 1992), training and career development (Chew & Chan, 2008) were unrelated to organizational commitment. Furthermore, Herrbach and co-workers (2009) showed that training opportunities were positively related to affective and high-sacrifice commitments and negatively related to lack of alternatives commitment and also did not find a positive relationship between flexible working conditions, the assignment of new roles and organizational commitment. These findings cast doubt upon the widely accepted idea that certain HR practices fit older employees (Kooij et al, 2008; Peterson & Spiker, 2005; Saba & Guerin, 2005; Schmidt & Lee, 2008). This study looks at flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation and recognition and respect in more detail below.

Before turning to the different HR practices under study, an overview below will be given presenting the different factors that influence commitment as was found by previous researchers.

Table 3.3: Factors influencing commitment

Factors	References
Communication	Watson & Papamarcos, 2002
Trust	Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008
Personal development	Meyer & Smith, 2000
Performance evaluation	Kuvaas, 2011
Career development/training	Kooij et al, 2008
Job design	Workman & Bommer, 2004
Perceived organizational justice	Andrews & Kacmar, 2001
Mentoring and teaching positions	Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004
Empowerment	Kuvaas, 2006
Recognition and respect	Greller & Stroh, 2004
Flexible work options	Anderson & Keliher, 2009

3.7.1 Flexible work options

Several studies have found that flexible work options are important to older employees (Humphrey et al., 2003; Shacklock, Fulop & Hort, 2007), and organizations are starting to recognize this by creating more and more flexible work arrangements (Hornung et al, 2008). In the past few years there has been growing interest from employers in flexible working and an increasing number have introduced a range of flexible working options for their employees (Kersley et al, 2005).

Anderson and Kelliher (2009) found that employees who were offered flexible work options had higher levels of organizational commitment, demonstrated by their pride in being part of the organization and their personal contribution to organizational success. They felt more committed and loyal to their employers because flexible working allowed their individual needs to be accommodated. They also found that flexible employees were prepared to work more or harder than employees who were not offered flexible work options (Anderson & Kelliher, 2009).

Although flexible work options can enhance organizational commitment, they are difficult and expensive to implement in certain industries and employees could perceive individualized arrangements as a disguised form of favoritism, which can negatively influence the atmosphere at the workplace and therefore actually decrease organizational commitment (Rousseau, 2005).

The labour market in Europe has seen a steady growth in part-time work. The Netherlands has even been called the first part-time economy in the world (Freeman, 1998; Visser, 2000). In The Netherlands part-time work comprises 37% of all jobs. The policy regarding part-time is a general one, meaning that part-time is accessible to all employees, regardless of age (OECD, 2005). Previous studies have given contradictory results regarding the relationship between full- and part-time employees and commitment. Some show that employees that work fulltime are more committed (Mellor et al, 2001), while others found no effects (Shockey & Mueller, 1994), or found that certain sub-groups of part-time working employees are more strongly committed (Sinclair, Martin & Michel, 1999).

The relationship between work status (fulltime versus part-time) and organizational commitment might be indirect and actually be due to demographic variables like gender, age, family status and education, the kind of contracts and work schedules and the nature of the work. Several findings suggest that job characteristics like variety, autonomy and task identity better explain the differences

in commitment than the length of the working week. Lee and Johnson (1991) relate the differences in commitment to the kind of contract people have. No difference is found between full-time and part-time workers as long as they are employed according to their preferred contract. It has been argued that the consistency between preferred and actual work schedule is a source of difference in commitment, whether the contract is fulltime or part-time (Barling & Gallagher, 1996).

Despite the possible mediating effects of factors not taken into account in this study, it is expected to find a positive relationship between a positive perception of the quality of flexible work options and organizational commitment.

3.7.2 Job design

Previous studies on job design and organizational commitment have produced contradictory results. For some, an opportunity to work on challenging assignments is positively related to organizational commitment (Furnham, 2002; Walker, 2001; Workman & Bommer, 2004), while some others did not find a positive relationship between challenging assignments and organizational commitment (Chew & Chan, 2008), which is in accordance with studies that found that older employees are more intrinsically committed to their work (Riordan et al, 2003).

Job design also includes opportunities to transfer to a less stressful/strenuous job. Here again, some research found that internal promotion has a positive relationship with organizational commitment (Appelbaum et al, 2000). However, in contrast, Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) argue that older employees are looking for a job that strengthens their identity and brings positive experiences. They state that older employees are less willing to perform new tasks and are happiest keeping their habitual job without learning new skills. In the same line, research has shown that older employees commit to an organization that allows them to use their existing knowledge, skills and abilities (Kristof, 1996; Withers, 2001).

The contradictory findings obtained by previous researchers are probably the result of the different populations and HR practices under study. In this study, based on the theoretical framework presented earlier, it is expected that a positive perception of the quality of job design has a positive relationship with organizational commitment.

3.7.3 Training

Providing training opportunities is a way to show older employees that they are still valued, important to an organization (Stein, 2000) and that they want to continue their employment relationship (Allen et al, 2003), especially since they have less access to it than younger employees (Rix, 2004; Taylor & Urwin, 2001).

Research has shown that older employees want to continue to develop their skills and knowledge (AARP 2000; 2002). However, many organizations assume that older employees are not interested in training opportunities (Goldberg, 2000).

Several studies have demonstrated that training opportunities hold a positive relationship with organizational commitment (Appelbaum et al, 2000; Bassi & Van Buren, 1999; Chai-Amonphaisal & Ussahawanitchakit, 2008) and that failing to provide training opportunities would have a negative influence on organizational commitment (Phillips, 1997). In contrast to these findings is the study of Chew and Chan (2008) who examined the impacts of key HR practices on permanent employees' organizational commitment and intention to stay in large public and private Australian organizations. Australian organizations are influenced by demographic changes, increasing dependence on outsourcing, and industrial relations reforms. Their study was carried out in three phases. First, 13 experts were interviewed using the Delphi technique to identify HR practices that influence the retention of Australian employees. Second, in-depth interviews with HR managers were conducted to rank order the identified HR practices and finally employees from Australian organizations responded to a survey. Chew and Chan (2008) found that training opportunities do not enhance organizational commitment. This non-significant association could be due to two reasons. First, there may be a mismatch between training and career development and personal growth, which might have an effect on organizational commitment. Several studies on organizational commitment suggest that an employer's ability to provide relevant and effective training has a marked effect on employee commitment to their organization (Bassi & Van Buren, 1999; Detoro & McCabe, 1997; Marchington & Wilkinson, 1997). Thus, these organizations may need to identify suitable training and career development needs for individuals (Wetland, 2003). The second reason may be explained by organizational constraints such as time, personnel, budget, training facilities, materials equipment, and the attitude of senior management (Gomez-Mejia et al, 1995). These restrictions have the potential to impact on the training content and consequently organizational commitment.

Assuming there are no organizational constraints to offer training opportunities and that the training and needs and wishes regarding personal growth of the employee are properly matched, it is expected that a positive perception of training opportunities has a positive relationship with organizational commitment.

3.7.4 Performance evaluation

Previous studies have shown that performance evaluation has a positive relationship with organizational commitment (Appelbaum et al, 2000; Chai-Amonphaisal & Ussahawanitchakit, 2008; Kuvaas, 2011; Slocombe & Bluedorn, 1999) which has been explained in different ways. Kuvaas (2011) has tested the relationship between performance appraisal reactions and affective organizational commitment. He revealed that the perceived helpfulness of performance appraisal was directly related to affective organizational commitment.

Latham (2003) stated that a performance appraisal is a way to communicate organizational strategies, goals and vision, and that this increases the commitment employees experience regarding these goals, which in turn enhances their affective organizational commitment. In this explanation performance appraisal is thus seen as a one-way communication tool. Other researchers have argued that performance appraisal has a positive influence on organizational commitment since it makes employees feel valued and part of the organization (Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Levy & Williams, 2004) and is a signal that the organization is committed to them (Snell & Dean, 1992). Here, performance appraisal is seen as a two-way communication process, rather than a one-way communication tool.

As is true for HR practices in general, the perception of fairness is important regarding performance evaluation. Perceived procedural justice has a strong positive relationship with organizational commitment (Lau & Moser, 2008; Steensma & Visser, 2007; Thurston & McNall, 2010), especially with affective organizational commitment since procedural fairness makes employees identify and emotionally engaged with the organization (Jaros et al, 1993). Perceived procedural fairness leads to performance appraisal satisfaction which is positively related to affective organizational commitment (Kuvaas, 2006).

In line with previous studies, and assuming that the employees under study perceive their performance appraisals as fair, a positive relationship between performance evaluation and organizational commitment is expected.

3.7.5 Recognition and respect

Recognition and respect are important to older employees. AARP (2002) found that 90% of the older employees wanted respect from their co-workers and 84% wanted respect from their supervisors. However, it remains unclear if the need for recognition and respect changes with age or that employees of other age groups value this as much as older employees do.

Several studies have come up with evidence that recognition and respect are positively related to organizational commitment. McEvoy and Blahna (2001) found that a lack of respect from colleagues and management is positively related to disengagement of older employees and that respect makes older employees want to do everything they can to fulfill their job responsibilities (Greller & Stroh, 2004). In the same line, Kuvaas (2006) demonstrated that recognition increases affective organizational commitment amongst highly skilled employees. Although the participants of the present study have an average low occupational status in contradiction with the studies cited above, it is expected to find a positive relationship between recognition and respect and organizational commitment. The following research issue allows participants to describe their commitment.

Research issue 3: How do older employees describe their commitment towards their organization and their occupation?

Based on the social exchange theory and previous studies, the following hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 3a: Perceived quality of HR practices has a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment: the more positive the perception of the quality of HR practices, the stronger the affective organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 3b: Perceived quality of HR practices is unrelated to continuance organizational commitment: the perception of HR practices does not influence one's continuance organizational commitment.

3.8 Other variables

Several demographic factors were included in the study and were analyzed only for the trade union. These demographic factors were gender, nationality, marital status,

educational level, sector, company size, job status (full-time/part-time), function and organizational tenure (distinguishing between current organization and current position).

3.9 Research issue 5

Although the quantitative part of this thesis focuses on how the perception of the quality of HR practices influences the preference for early retirement, this is obviously only one of the many factors influencing such a preference. In order to give a more complete picture, the qualitative part of this thesis tries to identify which other factors influence the retirement decision.

Feldman (1994) defined early retirement as a withdrawal from an organizational position or career path of considerable duration, before the official retirement age, with the intention of reduced psychological commitment to work. Early retirement is the result of an interplay between economic, social, societal, organizational and attitudinal variables (Beehr & Bennet, 2007; Taylor, Tillsley, Beausoleil & Wilson, 2000), labor market structures, opportunities related to social security systems (Esser, 2005; OECD, 2003), wage conditions, rigidity in workplace organization, inadequate skills and competencies, poor health status (OECD, 2006) and the widespread culture of early retirement that exists in the Netherlands (OECD, 2005). It has been considered a complex and long lasting psychosocial process (Ekerdt, 1998) and many studies have been conducted regarding the factors that influence the intention to retire early (Beehr, 1986; Bidewell, Griffin & Hesketh, 2006; Higgs et al, 2003; Quinn & Burkhauser, 1994; Talaga & Beehr, 1995) which further predicts the actual early retirement (Harkonmäki et al, 2009). The main factors will be discussed in more detail below.

Finances seem to be an important factor, with higher financial security being associated with a preference for early retirement, although it has also been argued that those who can afford to retire early might be the ones with challenging jobs that make them want to stay in the workforce rather than retire early (Beehr, Glazer, Nielson & Farmer, 2000; Flynn, 2010; Higgs, Mein, Ferrie, Hyde & Nazroo, 2003; Talaga & Beehr, 1989).

Health is another well-studied factor, suggesting that poor health tends to co-exist with a preference for early retirement (Boumans, De Jong & Vanderlinden, 2008; Carr, 2002; Mein et al, 2000) and that the development of health interventions tends to co-exist with the intention to delay retirement (Phillipson & Smith, 2006).

Disability legislation has also affected this trend, since the disability insurance has functioned as a major route into retirement until the 1990's (Bannink & De Vroom, 2007). However, new measures taken by the Dutch government have decreased its accessibility, which has functioned as an incentive for organizations to improve the labour conditions for older employees. As a result, older employees are now offered more often appropriate tasks that fit their physical and mental abilities, allowing them to keep on working longer and preventing them to retire early (Bannink & De Vroom, 2007).

Social support or social pressure from family members (Crego, Alcover de la Hera & Martinez-Inigo, 2008; El-Hamidi, 2010; Henkens & Van Solinge, 2002; Szinovacz, DeViney & Davey, 2001; Van Dam, Van der Vorst & Van der Heijden, 2009) has been identified to play an important role with having a spouse, children and a strong social network being related to a preference for early retirement. Also marital quality affects the retirement decision. Employees who share many leisure time activities with their spouses do have a stronger intention to leave the labor force than employees who undertake fewer activities (Henkens & Leenders, 2010; Van Dam et al, 2009). However, a reduced social network outside the workplace, and increased reliance on the workplace social network, has been associated with a preference for late retirement of single workers (Barnes-Farrell, 2003).

Gender also seems to be a factor with women having a stronger preference for early retirement (Boumans, De Jong & Vanderlinden, 2008; El-Hamidi, 2010), as well as educational level, with a lower educational level being associated with early retirement thoughts (Elovainio et al, 2005).

Many organizational factors that influence the retirement decision were identified in previous studies. It was found that pleasure, satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment derived from work (Henkens, 2000; Mein et al., 2000; Siegrist, Wahrendorf, Von dem Knesebeck, Jurges & Börsch-Supan, 2007), being challenged and valued (Pillay, Kelly & Tones, 2006) make older employees retire later. Shacklock and Brunetto (2011) also stressed the importance of working to the individual and the flexibility of working arrangements as well as Winkelmann-Gleed (2012) who showed the importance to balance financial security in later life with the positive elements of work and the desire to match work with other commitments. On the other hand, low perceived control over the retirement decision (Van Dam et al., 2009), little challenging jobs (Workman & Bommer, 2004), bad and stressful working conditions, excessive or deficient workloads, high job demands and poor job

control (Elovainio et al., 2005; Mein et al., 2000) have been found to incline people to retire early. Also, being a mentor or being able to share their knowledge and experiences has been identified as a factor that influences the retirement decision. Tacit knowledge, defined as being personal and specific in nature, since it is based on subjective awareness, intuition, senses, ideals, experience, values, and feelings embedded in the individual (Polanyi, 1958) is not codified; it is not communicated and is acquired by sharing experiences, by observation and imitation. Tacit knowledge is knowledge, such as expertise, skill, understanding, or professional insight formed as a result of experience (Subashini, 2010) and it is implicit and context-specific knowledge (Sternberg et al., 1995). In an organization, individuals perceive tacit knowledge as having higher strategic importance than explicit knowledge, especially with respect to the creation of organizational knowledge since it is difficult to copy (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). Therefore, individuals consider tacit knowledge to be 'expensive' knowledge and thus value tacit more than explicit knowledge (Reychav & Weisberg, 2000). Tacit knowledge has tremendous value when made available to the right people at the right time (Subashini, 2010). A precondition to activate tacit knowledge in the innovation process is to make sure that one is able to identify the relevant tacit knowledge in the organization (Subashini, 2010). Tacit knowledge enables an increased perception of ideas. Therefore, it stimulates creativity and has a positive effect on business activities. The identification of tacit knowledge is often heavily hindered, but is made possible through the scope of personal contacts where ideas are sharply critiqued but individuals are respected (Subashini, 2010).

Related to the above discussion on tacit knowledge is the concept of knowledge sharing. Reychav and Weisberg (2009) have identified the ways in which explicit and tacit knowledge sharing occur in organizations and have investigated the impact of sharing these two knowledge types on the employee's performance and intention to leave in high-tech companies working in the telecommunications field. They found that knowledge sharing increased employees' performance and reduced their intention to leave the organization (Reychav & Weisberg, 2009). It has been argued that companies in dynamic industries (Collins & Smith, 2006), like the creative industry, may be especially dependent on the ability of knowledge workers to exchange and combine knowledge. Indeed, in sharing knowledge, successful organizations take greater advantage of the knowledge they possess than other organizations (Egan et al., 2004). Also, the loss of accumulated knowledge resulting

from employees' decisions to leave an organization is one of the key problems organizations must face (Droege & Hoobler, 2003). Individual employees transfer only part of their accumulated knowledge to the organization, which must then attempt to protect itself from the impact of employee departure (Koudsi, 2000). Employees who engage in knowledge sharing behaviors are likely to want to continue taking part in organizational activities which leads to a decreased likelihood that they will leave (Reychav & Weisberg, 2009). Furthermore, an environment within which knowledge is shared and knowledge sharing is encouraged may further encourage employees to contribute more, and hence expand and deepen their knowledge (Reychav & Weisberg, 2009). According to Reychav and Weisberg (2009) knowledge sharing is based on exchange relationships, which involve the expectations for the provision of future benefits for the employee who shares knowledge with peers, managers, and the organization. Given the difficulty in representing tacit knowledge in an unambiguous way, relationships become the most important way for the transmission of tacit knowledge (Tsoukas, 2003). Relationships allow people to identify the source of knowledge, who controls the knowledge, or who knows the person who does. Mor-Barak (1995) has shown that older employees might want to extend their working lives if they had opportunities to pass their knowledge onto younger colleagues. However, Greller (2000) did not find that this would increase their willingness to stay in the workforce.

Vickerstaff, Cox and Keen (2003) stated that any significant change in retirement behavior will come from measures taken by employers. They state that employers will have to provide a workplace in which older employees feel tempted to keep on working until or beyond the legal retirement age. Changes at the workplace or the provision of HR practices are some of such possible measures. This thesis will look at the perception of the quality of HR practices and its influence on retirement preferences.

The Netherlands has a relatively low unemployment rate and is therefore most likely to implement measures that stress the importance of enhancing the labour force participation of older employees. One possibility for an organization to do so is by changing their HR practices policy. Research has shown that an organization's HR practices can influence employee attitudes (Appelbaum et al, 2000) in a way that it enhances their retention (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003; Huselid, 1995; Shaw, Delery, Jenkins & Gupta, 1998; Vandenberg et al, 1999; Way, 2002; Zappala, 2008).

In order to give an overview of the factors found in previous studies that influence the preference for early retirement, table 3.4 below is presented.

Table 3.4: Factors influencing the retirement decision as found in previous research.

Factor	Reference
Finances	Bidewell et al, 2006
Health	Boumans et al, 2008
Social support / social pressure	Van Dam et al, 2009
Commitment	Davies & Cartwright, 2011
Perceived control over retirement decision	Van Dam et al, 2009
Pleasure / satisfaction derived from work	Lord, 2004
Stereotypes about older employees	Boumans et al, 2008
Early retirement schemes	Fouarge & Schils, 2009
Working conditions	Shacklock & Brunetto, 2011

The following research issue examines the factors that influence the retirement decision of older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands.

Research issue 5: Which factors influence their retirement decisions?

3.10 Model

My model builds on a previous study by Herrbach et al., (2009) who looked at older managers in France and his model tested how training, flexible working conditions, the availability of new roles and encouragement to retire relate to voluntary early retirement and organizational commitment. My study builds on this model by extending the range of HR practices: performance evaluation, recognition and respect and a broader range of items related to job design, training and flexible work options. Job design, training and flexible work options were also included in Herrbach’s study, but more items/aspects were included in the present study, compared to Herrbach et al.’s study. This is outlined in the table below where the differences in items compared to Herrbach’s model are depicted in italics:

Table 3.5: Items of several HR practices compared to Herrbach’s study

HR practice	Item Herrbach’s model	Items present model
Job design	<div>1. Opportunity to act as internal consultant</div> <div>2. Opportunity to act as trainer</div> <div>3. Opportunity to act as mentor</div> <div>4. Opportunity to act as project coordinator</div>	<div>1. <i>The provision of challenging and important assignments or special projects</i></div> <div>2. The creation of new positions for older employees</div>

		3. <i>The possibility to transfer to a less stressful/strenuous job</i> 4. <i>The provision of a career plan</i>
Training	1. Training opportunities enabling me to continuously update my skills 2. Training opportunities adapted to my needs 3. Training opportunities enabling me to extend my computer skills 4. Training opportunities enabling me to develop my management skills	1. Training/education for older employees to keep their work-skills up-to-date 2. <i>Training/education for older employees to acquire new skills</i> 3. The provision of new technologies that will help older employees to execute their job. 4. <i>The provision of the same opportunities for older and younger employees to get promoted or to be transferred</i>
Flexible work options	1. Possibility to have flexible hours 2. Possibility to work part-time 3. Possibility to reduce my work time gradually as I approach retirement 4. Possibility to work from home	1. The possibility to have flexible working hours (days/hours) 2. The possibility to work a reduced work week (part-time) 3. <i>The possibility to share a full-time job (job-sharing)</i> 4. The possibility to work from home

Also, the population is different (managers versus on average low occupational status workers). Furthermore, Herrbach et al. (2009) looked at the two components of continuance commitment, while this thesis does not make such a distinction. Furthermore, voluntary retirement was chosen in Herrbach et al.,’s (2009) study while this study looks at a preference for early retirement.

The model was built in three steps. The first step was based on the literature, the second step added the context in which this study took place to the model and finally some changes were made after the exploratory qualitative study.

In the first step, as a result of the literature review, a first model appeared based on what previous studies have found and identified gaps in the literature.

Secondly, the specific context in which this study took place was added. The way this has influenced the findings is explained in chapter two on the context, but will be briefly summarized below. The context existed of five parts: the creative industry, the Dutch national culture, the membership of the trade union, the sample of older employees and the average low occupational status of the employees. The creative industry influences the model since this industry has physically challenging jobs and irregular working hours. It will show for example that HR practices related to job design, especially the possibility to go to a less strenuous job is of particular importance to the population under study. Secondly, the Dutch national culture affects the findings because it is a feminine country and therefore HR practices

related to part-time work and a caring attitude on the side of the organization are likely to be considered 'normal' by the employees. Thirdly, the fact that all participants were a member of the trade union has an impact, since it might be that they are unsatisfied with their jobs or organizations and feel they need to be part of a trade union for their needs and wishes to be heard. This argument is plausible since the trade union membership has recently risen especially among older employees, while at the same time there is a trend that they are leaving the industry. Recently, it has been argued that younger and older people join a trade union for different reasons. Older people are joining trade unions to get higher salaries or better working conditions. They are over-represented because they often stay a member of the trade union even when they retire. Since membership of this trade union was compulsory in the past, it is likely that many employees kept their membership, especially older workers. Younger people feel they do not need a trade union and are under-represented. They stopped their membership or do not want to join because important issues are not addressed in their opinion (Van de Haterd, 2013). Fourthly, the sample consisted of older employees, which is the same as the previous study on which this theoretical model was built. However, on page 215-216 the lack of control group is explained and the findings of previous studies are reported in order to be able to better position the results of this thesis and compare them. The last aspect of the context was the low average occupational status. This is in strong contrast with the study of Herrbach et al., (2009) and therefore changes my model. It is expected that the older employees with an average low occupational status would perceive the HR practices in a different way and would react to the provision of those differently, since previous studies have found that they have different needs as explained in the literature review above.

The third and last step was the exploratory qualitative study that determined which HR practices would be included in the quantitative survey. It also changed the age threshold of the population from the intended 50 to 45 years, based on the perceived age discrimination from the age of 45 onwards. So the theoretical framework below is the result of three steps: the literature review, the context and the qualitative study. The qualitative study was thus based on the two first steps: literature review and context and resulted in the same model as the one depicted below, but added more precise information to this model by determining which HR practices would be integrated in the model. More precisely, it led to a broader range of HR practices related to training, flexible work options and job design and added

the practices related to performance evaluation as well as recognition and respect that had been absent in Herrbach’s model.

Below Herrbach et al.’s model will be depicted before the final model of this thesis will be presented.

Figure 3.1: Model of Herrbach et al. (2009).

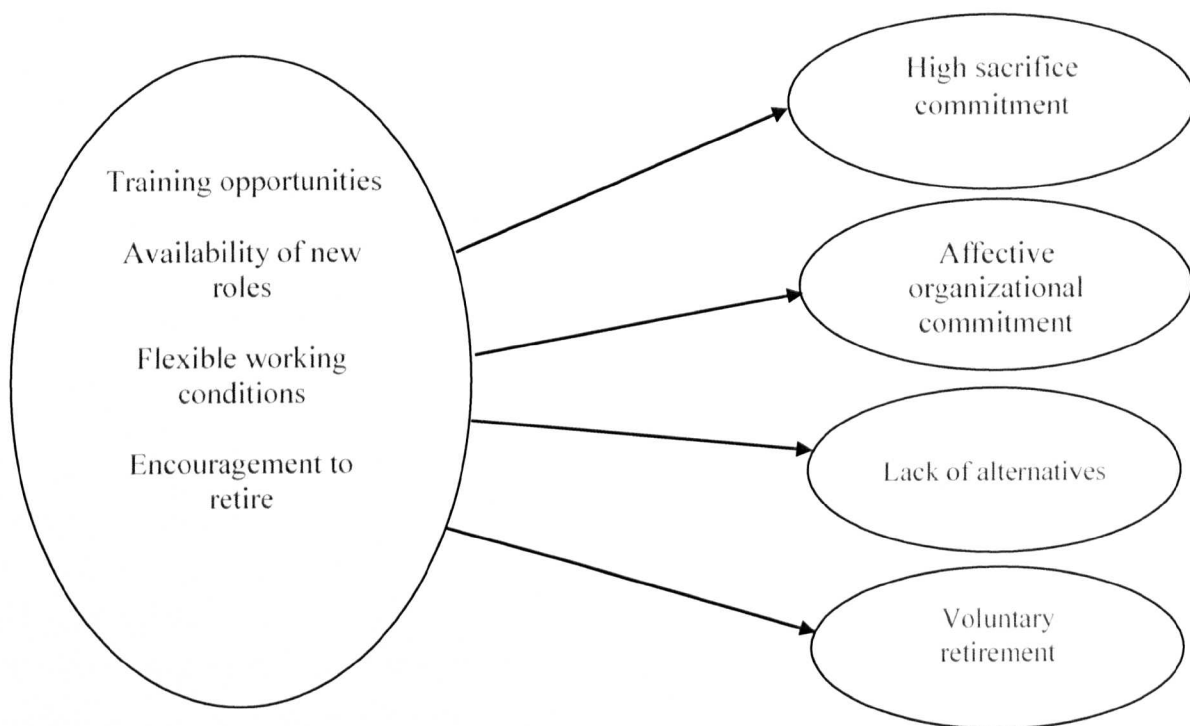
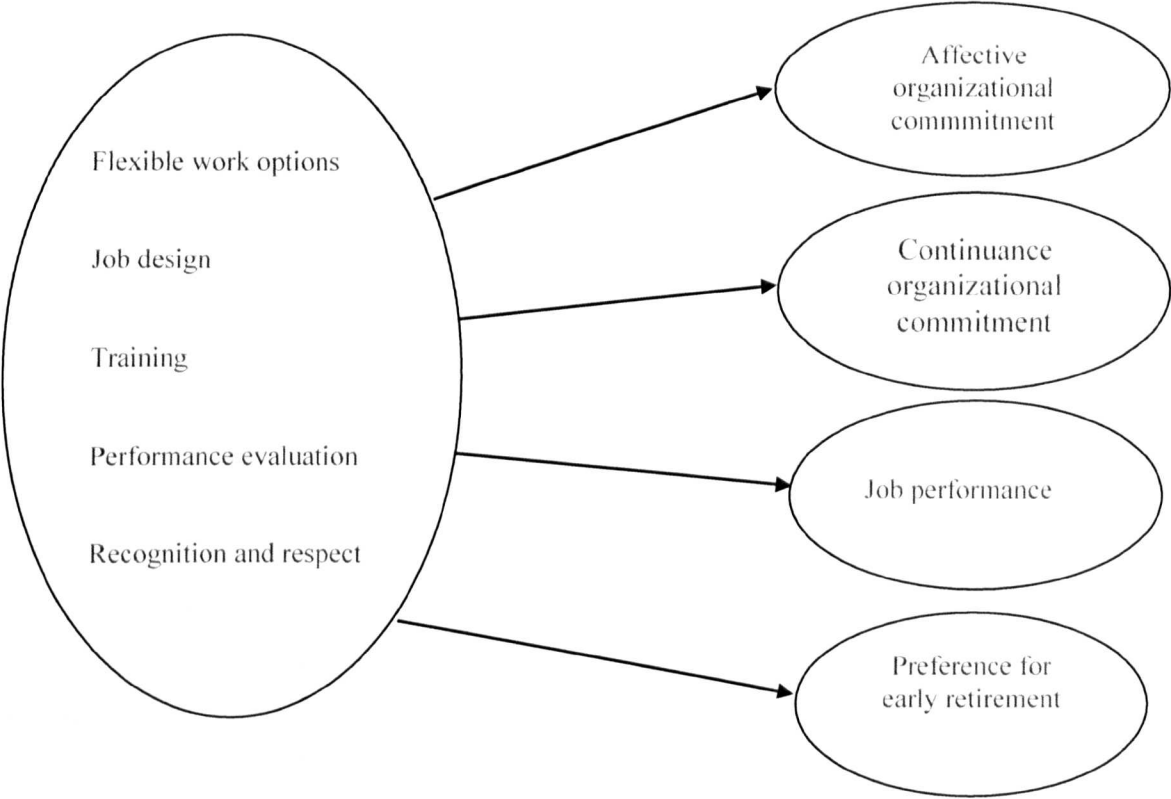


Figure 3.2: Model of the quantitative study of this thesis



3.11 Summary

The present study examines the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices on the one hand and job performance, commitment and the preference for early retirement on the other hand using a social exchange perspective. It examines only the employee perspective. It is expected that perceived quality of HR practices has a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment and job performance. Furthermore a negative relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and the preference to retire early is expected and it is hypothesized that perceived quality of HR practices does not influence continuance organizational commitment.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter is about the methodology adopted in this thesis. It can be divided in three parts: the first part discusses epistemological issues and the mixed methods design, the second part will explain the qualitative study and the third part will deal with the quantitative study. The first part of the chapter will start with a section about epistemology, ontology and paradigms. It was considered necessary to give an overview of the underlying issues when dealing with the choices made in terms of methodology. Furthermore, the link between epistemological and ontological orientations, paradigms and research methods will be outlined and the mixed methods approach will be presented. In the second part, the chapter will explain the methods used in the qualitative part of this study. The procedures, strategy, instruments, processes of analysis and interpretation will be discussed and justified. Related issues like reliability, validity and generalizability will also be discussed as well as some ethical considerations and the weaknesses of the methodology. The last part of this chapter will deal with the quantitative part of this study. This part will explain and justify the methods used in carrying out the quantitative study. It will discuss and justify the research context, the design, the pre-test, the instruments, the procedures and the limitations.

4.1 Methodological approaches

This section will explain the epistemology and ontological position, deals with axiology and reflexivity and explains the mixed methods approach.

4.1.1 Epistemology

Epistemology indicates what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Mason, 2002; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). A particular central issue is the question of whether or not the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures and ethos as the natural sciences (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Positivism is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In other words, it refers to working with an observable social reality and the end product of such research can be law-like generalizations similar to those produced by the natural sciences (Silverman, 2011). Positivist researchers are likely to use a highly structured methodology in order to facilitate replication and are likely

to use existing theory to develop hypotheses (Gill, Johnson & Murray, 2010). Clearly, this epistemological position lends itself best to quantitative research and is not appropriate for a mixed methods design that also includes an exploratory qualitative study that uses semi-structured in-depth interviews by telephone. As such, this position was rejected for the mixed methods design in this study.

Emotionalists are not concerned with obtaining objective ‘facts’ but with eliciting authentic accounts of subjective experience. They aim to access emotions by describing interviewees’ inner experiences and by encouraging interviewers to become emotionally involved with respects and to convey their own feelings (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). However, the researcher/interviewer does not feel that it is necessary to become emotionally involved and convey her own feelings, also because the topics discussed do not apply to the researcher. Another reason why the emotionalist position has not been considered appropriate is the average low occupational status of the interviewees. The interviewees might need a certain amount of guidance and probing during the interview to make them talk. By adopting open-ended or non-directive interviewing as is preferred by emotionalists, passivity on the side of the interviewer can create a powerful constraint on the interviewee to talk (Perakyla, 1995).

Interpretivism has been derived from the German intellectual tradition that emerged in the second half of the 19th century. Interpretivist scholars stated that the human sciences were fundamentally different from the natural sciences and, as such, could not be studied in the same manner (Silverman, 2011). Interpretivism is related to constructionism and argues that the social world of business and management is far too complex to lend itself to theorizing by definite laws in the same way as the physical sciences (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). It advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors. This emphasizes the difference between conducting research among people rather than objects and therefore requires researchers to understand the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Many of the ideas in interpretivism and constructionism stem from the German intellectual tradition of hermeneutics and the “Verstehen” tradition in sociology. This perspective states that we are in a continual process of interpreting the social world around us in that we interpret the actions of others with whom we interact. This interpretation leads to adjustment of our own meanings and actions. It has been argued that an interpretivist perspective is highly appropriate in the case of business and management research,

particularly in such fields as organizational behavior and human resource management (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Interpretivists are thus concerned with understanding the meanings which people give to objects, social settings, events and the behaviours of others, and how these understandings in turn define the settings. Interpretivists use methods of data collection that allow the meanings behind the actions of the people under study to be revealed. Commonly used methods in interpretivist studies are interviews, observation and analysis of documents of all kinds (Gephart, 1999). Interpretivism is the epistemological position chosen in this study. It does not have the rigidity of positivism in order to capture the richness of qualitative data derived with semi-structured in-depth telephone interviews and it does not lack of structure that would be found in the emotionalist position. Interpretivism is sufficiently flexible and takes into account the importance of the context and the way people create meaning. Both the form and content are considered, which is considered necessary in order to have an account as complete as possible. In this study data analysis was conducted in tandem with data collection. In line with the interpretivist approach, hermeneutics was used in the second round of data analysis in order to take into account how people give meaning to objects, events or behaviors of others and how this is related to the context.

4.1.2 Ontology

Questions of social ontology are concerned with the nature of social entities (Mason, 2002). It focuses on the issue whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. These two positions are called objectivism and constructionism (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Objectivism is an ontological position that implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Constructionism is an ontological position which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. This is the ontological position adopted in this study. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Constructionism also suggests that the categories that people employ in helping them to understand the world are in fact social products: their meaning is constructed in and through interaction (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The constructionist position is concerned with

how interviewees actively create meaning. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) put it: accounts are not simply representations of the world, they are part of the world they describe. Constructionists are concerned with *what* interviewees are saying as well as *how* they say it (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Context is therefore important and constructionists believe that people's worlds are very complex. As Raply (2004) puts it, 'we are never interacting in a historic-socio-cultural vacuum, we are always embedded in and selectively and artfully draw on broader institutional and organizational contexts. The use of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1962) as a way to analyze the qualitative data is therefore in line with this ontological position. Hermeneutics focuses on understanding and interpretation. Since hermeneutics is also called "the art of interpretation", this is what was needed. I needed to make sense of what had been said, but the simple words did not give me the clue, I needed to go beyond those words to interpret what had been said. A hermeneutic approach has five characteristics which will be outlined and explained below.

First of all, it seeks understanding rather than explanation. The hermeneutic circle in which one looks at the whole and the different parts and how they are interdependent and integrated was very helpful and also allowed for continuous improvement of understanding of the findings. More concretely, when examining in detail one subject or finding, I had to break it down into different pieces. However, by better understanding how those different parts all related to the overall subject, it improved my understanding of the big subject under examination. For example, when studying the attitude of older employees towards the provision of HR practices, they mentioned not only that they perceived the provision of HR practices as a stamp that they belong to a devalued social group, but they simultaneously felt that it would be normal for organizations to provide them with different tasks and working hours. More information I got, the more complete the picture became, even though the picture became somehow less clear, it reflected better and better the complexity of the issue. So it was a cycle of breaking down into parts, and integrating it back again into to define the whole. As a result of this, complexity was allowed for and not avoided. Secondly, it acknowledges the situated location of interpretation. This was dealt with by including a whole chapter on the context in which this thesis took place. Thirdly, it recognizes the role of language and historicity in interpretation. This was especially difficult to deal with, since the interviews were conducted in Dutch, but are presented here in English. However, for difficult citations parallel

translations were used in order to capture the richness of language. Fourthly, hermeneutics views inquiry as conversation. As such, it was important to find common language between the interviewer and the interviewee, which led to a way of talking adapted to the interviewee, by using simpler phrases and words. A second challenge relates to the role of the interpreter, since the researcher highlighted relevant features of the texts, gave intonation to the texts and was involved in the conversation. As mentioned earlier, the researcher is indeed not free from bias and it is important to acknowledge its influence. Finally, hermeneutics is comfortable with ambiguity. This characteristic was an important reason for choosing hermeneutics. The findings of the qualitative study were not always clear, there were many opposing and contradictory findings, pointing into different or sometimes even opposing directions. The fact that this philosophy allows for such ambiguity in order to capture the richness of the findings was necessary, since otherwise not all patterns would have been described or identified, leading to unreal findings in which it seems that all interviewees thought and experienced the same things.

4.1.3 Axiology and reflexivity

Axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies judgments about value. Heron (1996) states that our values guide all human action. He argues that researchers demonstrate axiological skill by being able to articulate their values as a basis for making judgments about what research they are conducting and how they are doing it. According to Heron (1996), a researcher shows his or her values at all stages in the research process.

Another concept that can be linked to the notion of axiology discussed above is reflexivity. Reflexivity means that researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases and decision for the knowledge of the social world they generate (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It assumes that all researchers carry their cultural baggage, personal idiosyncrasies and implicit assumptions about the nature of reality. Since the researcher is the primary “instrument” of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is deemed essential (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Experts contend that through reflection researchers may become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing (Russell & Kelly, 2002). This entails careful consideration of the phenomenon under study, as well the ways a researcher’s own assumptions and behavior may be impacting the inquiry. Researchers are advised to carefully consider their reasons for conducting a

particular study (Maxwell, 2005), since they will have important consequences for the trustworthiness of a project. If design decisions and data analyses are based on personal desires without a careful assessment of the implications of these methods and conclusions, they risk creating a flawed study. While it is neither possible nor necessary to purge one's self of personal goals and concerns, Maxwell (2005) contends that it is crucial to be aware of these concerns and how they are shaping the research, and to think about how best to deal with their consequences. My reasons for wanting to conduct a study about older employees was based on demographical information and journal articles talking about problems related to ageing population. Although I personally feel more affinity with the field of woman at the workplace, I felt there was a lack of research on older employees which has led me to choose this topic. When the trade union FNV-KIEM, the trade union in the creative industry in the Netherlands, offered its database to be used I chose to work with them since this industry has not been studied before and because many older employees are leaving the industry. The themes I wanted to explore in greater depth were based on the identified gaps in the literature and my own personal preference for psychological constructs like commitment which is the result of my background in psychology. New to qualitative research, the open en emerging character of this type of inquiry attracted my curiosity and I considered it especially useful in under-researched populations like older employees with an average low occupational status. In the data analysis stage, a first round of content analysis was used, followed by the use of hermeneutics in order to go to a deeper level of understanding, grasping what was behind the words that had been said. In my point of view, mixed methods and the related ways of analyzing and presenting data come from the internal need to present a research project as complete as possible, including contradictions, overlaps and different explanations for the findings.

I have undertaken several reflexive practices in this study. First of all, I have kept a research diary (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001). This diary consisted of four parts, observational notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes and analytic memo. The observational and methodological notes were written each time an interview was conducted. The observational note was written with as little interpretation as possible, while the methodological note reflected on how the interview went and the role of the researcher in it. The theoretical note was a document that was updated after each interview. I wrote down initial ideas, concepts and explanations of what I had found so far. The analytic memo is another document

and extends the theoretical note by the identification of recurrent patterns and a link to the literature.

4.1.4 Link paradigms-epistemological and ontological positions and research methods

In practice, there is a link between the choice of a certain research method, a paradigm, epistemological and ontological positions. Quantitative research is typically associated with a deductive approach that is the testing of theory, a positivist epistemological position and an objective ontological orientation (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Qualitative research is typically associated with an inductive approach that is the generation of theory, an interpretivist epistemological orientation and a constructionist ontological orientation (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, while connections between epistemological issues and research practice exist, it is important not to overstate them, since they are tendencies rather than fixed connections (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Mason, 2002).

Paradigms can be defined as worldviews or belief systems that guide researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative and quantitative research have two different underlying paradigms. Advocates of both paradigms have strongly disagreed with one another, leading to what has been called a ‘war’ of paradigms (Creswell, 1995). Over the years, researchers have started to point out that one should use the method that works best for the research problem under study, regardless of the underlying paradigm (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994), creating a new view of the world: pragmatism. Pragmatism arises out of actions, situations and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (Creswell, 2009). Pragmatism is not committed to a system of philosophy and reality. In other words, researchers are free to use whatever method they think suits the research problem best. Pragmatism has opened the door to multiple methods. The focus is on practical applied research and integration of different perspectives to help interpreting data. It has been argued that one should look for synergy between the different epistemological positions (Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Maxwell & Loomis, 2003). The underlying assumption is that research is stronger when it mixes research paradigms, because a fuller understanding of human phenomena is gained. It calls for using “whatever philosophical and/or methodological approach works for the particular research problem under study” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Researchers believe it is more ethical to mix methods “in order to represent a plurality of interests, voices, and

perspectives” (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). There is a philosophically grounded *a priori* commitment to using mixed methods to reach the same utility and accuracy goals held by the pragmatists, but through complementarity rather than compatibility. In this study this position was adopted to get the most complete picture possible of the issues and experiences of older employees while being able to generalize to a certain extent to the population under study by the use of quantitative research.

4.1.5 The evolution in thinking about mixed methods

This thesis will conduct two studies: one qualitative and one quantitative in nature. Both studies have their own results chapter and their findings will be integrated in the last chapter. Not everyone considers mixed methods desirable and feasible (Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2011). Two versions about the nature of quantitative and qualitative research can be identified: an epistemological and a technical version. The epistemological version sees quantitative and qualitative research as grounded in incompatible epistemological and ontological principles. This version argues that mixed methods research is impossible. The technical version focuses on the strengths of ways both qualitative and quantitative research by looking at ways to collect and analyze data. They recognize that qualitative and quantitative research are in general associated with distinctive epistemological and ontological assumptions, but they see these connections as flexible. The technical version perceives research methods as independent from epistemological and ontological positions.

Researchers have started to refer to ‘mixed methods’, which contain elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Patton, 2002). Researchers have used different terms to refer to this approach like integrating, synthesis, quantitative and qualitative methods, multi-methods and mixed methodology (Creswell, 2009). However, recent studies have used the term mixed methods (Creswell, 2009; Silverman, 2011).

4.1.6 Advantages and disadvantages of mono-methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods present strengths and weaknesses. Before discussing the mixed methods approach, it is important to have an understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the qualitative and quantitative methods. These will be outlined below, before moving on to a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the mixed methods approach. Quantitative research has been criticized on several grounds. First of all, it has been argued that quantitative researchers fail to

distinguish people and social institutions from the world of nature (Bryman & Bell, 2008). Secondly, it has been stated the measurement process possesses an artificial sense of precision and accuracy (Cicourel, 1964). Thirdly, it has been suggested that the reliance on instruments and procedures hinders the connection between research and everyday life (Cicourel, 1982) and lastly, the analysis of relationships between variables has been criticized to create a static view of social life that is independent of peoples' lives (Blumer, 1956). Another problem with quantitative research is that it is difficult to explain relationships between variables. It has been argued that this problem can be overcome by further exploring relationships between variables by conducting qualitative investigations (Bryman & Bell, 2007). On the other hand, qualitative research has been criticized as being too subjective, difficult to replicate, lacking transparency (Bryman & Burgess, 1994) and problematic generalizations (Bryman & Bell, 2008). A problem often mentioned in qualitative research is that there is a tendency for data to be presented in an anecdotal fashion, giving little sense of the relative importance of the themes identified (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The strengths of qualitative research are that it has the capacity to constitute arguments about how things work in particular contexts as well as the capability of producing cross-contextual generalities (Mason, 2002), while quantitative research has the strength to test hypotheses (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

4.1.7 Why use mixed methods

Mixed methods makes the overall study strength larger than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) by providing strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research. This has been the historical argument for mixed methods research for the last 25 years (Jick, 1979). The argument goes that quantitative research is weak in understanding the context or setting in which people talk. Also, the voices of participants are not directly heard in quantitative research. Further, quantitative researchers are in the background, and their own personal biases and interpretations are seldom discussed. Qualitative research makes up for these weaknesses. On the other hand, qualitative research is seen as deficient because of the personal interpretations made by the researcher, the ensuing bias created by this, and the difficulty in generalizing findings to a large group because of the limited number of participants studied. Quantitative research, it is argued, does not have these weaknesses. The combination of both approaches can offset the weaknesses of either approach. Mixed methods research provides more

comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative research alone. It also helps answer questions that cannot be answered by qualitative or quantitative approaches alone and it encourages the use of multiple worldviews or paradigms rather than the typical association of certain paradigms for quantitative researchers and others for qualitative researchers. It also encourages us to think about a paradigm that might encompass all of quantitative and qualitative research, such as pragmatism, or using multiple paradigms in research.

Jick (1979) argued that the weaknesses of one method could be offset by the strength of another by the use of triangulation. Increasingly, triangulation is being used to refer to a process of cross-checking findings derived from both quantitative and qualitative research (Deacon, Bryman & Fenton, 1998). It has been argued that ‘a combination of methods ... emerges as the most valid and reliable way to develop understanding of such complex social reality as the corporation’ (Kanter, 1977). Greene et al. (1989) have evaluated 57 studies using a mixed methods approach. They found the purpose of mixed methods studies to be based on triangulation (seeking convergence), complementarities (examining overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon), initiation (discovering paradoxes and adding fresh perspectives), development (use sequential different methods) and expansion (adding breath and scope). Issues related to reliability and generalizability have led people to use quantitative research in tandem with qualitative research (Schroder, 1999). Web et al. (1966) have argued that confidence in the findings deriving from quantitative research can be enhanced by using more than one way of measuring a concept. It has been argued that quantitative and qualitative data deriving from mixed methods research should be mutually illuminating (Bryman, 2006).

4.1.8 Approaches to mixed methods

Mixed methods refer to the methodology of a study which has both qualitative and quantitative research elements (Silverman, 2011). Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell, 2009). This study has used triangulation. Triangulation usually refers to combining multiple theories, methods observers, and empirical materials to produce a more accurate, comprehensive and objective representation of the object of study (Silverman, 2011). In this study method triangulation has been used, by conducting both semi-structured in-depth interviews and using a survey. Triangulation is not a way of obtaining ‘the

truth', but 'is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The results of the exploratory qualitative study have been used to design the survey for the quantitative study and after the results of the quantitative study, the researcher went back to the qualitative study to compare the results, find similarities, contradictions, explanations and overlap between the two studies conducted.

4.1.9 The order of mixed methods

This study has used a sequential exploratory approach (Creswell, 2009). Three steps can be identified: qualitative-quantitative-qualitative. Creswell (2009) defined sequential mixed methods procedures as those in which the researcher seeks to elaborate on or expand on the findings of one method with another method. In sequential analysis one conducts first a qualitative study to identify themes through content analysis followed by statistical analysis of quantitative data that were built on the results of the first phase (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In this thesis both studies are considered equally important and are therefore called equivalent status studies. The three steps are briefly outlined below.

First an exploratory qualitative study was conducted in order to identify issues important to older employees as well as their perception and availability of human resource practices at their organizations. This information was then used to design the survey that was used in the quantitative study. Content analysis was used in this first round of analysis of the qualitative data.

Secondly, the quantitative study was conducted and analyzed.

Thirdly, after having obtained the findings of the quantitative study, the researcher decided to analyze again the qualitative study in a different way by the use of hermeneutics in order to find explanations for the findings of the quantitative study. This last step in the analysis was not expected, but necessary to be able to interpret and understand the findings.

An example of the heremeneutic process in which I go from the qualitative study to the quantitative study and back to the qualitative study again is provided in appendix 11. It shows how a certain issue is analyzed by the use of interview texts and the excerpts from the research diary.

4.1.10 Qualitative interviews

This section will give an overview of the research issues and explain and justify the choice of these research issues. The themes are based on identified gaps in the literature. Research issues (in the qualitative study) and hypotheses (in the quantitative study) partially overlap. Most research issues cover issues also tested in the quantitative part of this thesis. The overlapping research issues will provide in-depth information on the relationships being tested, while non-overlapping research issues will provide more insights on related issues for older employees, giving a more complete picture of the landscape of this thesis as a whole. To summarize, I used a qualitative study for three reasons:

- to cover issues not dealt with in the quantitative study
- to help designing the quantitative study
- to give explanations and deeper understanding of the findings from both studies

The research issues dealt with in the qualitative study are the following:

- 1.) *How do older employees experience the world of work today?*
- 2.) *How do older employees perceive HR practices in their organization?*
- 3.) *How do older employees describe their commitment toward their organization and their occupation?*
- 4.) *How do older employees describe their job performance?*
- 5.) *Which factors influence their retirement decision?*

4.1.11 Quantitative survey

The following hypotheses will be addressed in quantitative study:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived quality of HR practices has a negative relationship with the preference for early retirement: the more positive the perception of the quality of HR practices, the weaker the preference for early retirement.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived quality of HR practices has a positive relationship with job performance: the more positive the perception of the quality of HR practices, the better the job performance.

Hypothesis 3a: Perceived quality of HR practices has a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment: the more positive the perception of the quality of HR practices, the stronger the affective organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 3b: Perceived quality of HR practices is unrelated to continuance organizational commitment: the perception of the quality of HR practices does not influence one's continuance organizational commitment.

4.2 Qualitative procedures

This section of the methodology chapter will deal with the qualitative methods of this thesis. There have been many attempts to define qualitative research (Bryman, 2001; Hammersley, 1996), although no consensus has been reached (Silverman, 2011).

Some key elements of this methodological approach can be identified. First, qualitative research aims at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world by learning about circumstances, experiences, perspectives and histories of interviewees (Mason, 2002). Second, samples are small and purposively selected on the basis of certain criteria (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Third, data collection is interactive and developmental in nature and allows for the exploration of emergent issues. Another key element is that data are detailed and rich in information (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, analysis of qualitative research is open to emerging concepts and ideas and includes detailed descriptions and classifications, the identification of patterns or associations and explanations for the findings obtained. Lastly, outputs tend to focus on interpretation of social meaning through re-presenting the social world of interviewees.

Qualitative research contains a whole variety of strategies of inquiry that one can use (Mason, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Creswell (2009) has identified as strategies narrative analysis, phenomenology, ethnographic accounts, case study, grounded theory, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, analytic induction, participatory action research, life histories and content analysis. This thesis has used content analysis and hermeneutics. First content analysis was used in order to identify which HR practices should be included in the survey for the quantitative study. However, after having analyzed the results of the quantitative study, some questions remained about how to explain these results. As such, the researcher went back to the qualitative data and conducted a second round of analysis, this time hermeneutics was used in order to get to a deeper level of understanding and explanation.

4.2.1 Instruments

Concerning the choice of data collection method, a choice was made between generated data and naturally occurring data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Choosing between them depends on which type of data will best illuminate the research topic and on practical considerations (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). Generated data collection gives interviewees a direct and explicit opportunity to convey their own meanings and interpretations through the explanations they give, which is the type of information sought in the present study. Also, the natural context here is not critical for its understanding and the interviewees are able to give a full account and explain themselves. In other words, the context is no fundamental aspect of the research phenomenon, so observing or experiencing the topic under study in its natural context is not critical to understanding. As such, naturally occurring data is not necessary here and therefore not chosen in this study.

Then a choice was made between in-depth interviews and focus groups. The choice between the two options concerns three key factors: the type of data sought; the subject area; and the nature of the study group (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I opted for in-depth interviews since they provide an opportunity for detailed investigation of personal views and experiences of each interviewee (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Focus groups offer less opportunity for individual accounts and focus on group processes and interactions between interviewees. Another reason why in-depth interviews were chosen regards the subject matter. The issues in the study are personal and fairly complex. Underlying motivations and decisions are discussed which are best addressed in in-depth interviews. More abstract, intangible or conceptual topics suit better the use of focus groups (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Regarding the nature of the study group, interviews can take place wherever interviewees want while focus groups need a common location, which is a constraint for interviewees.

The interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The use of semi-structured interviews means that the researcher has an interview guide, a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered, but the interviewee is free to reply how he/she wants (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Questions may not be asked in the order outlined in the interview guide and additional questions not present in the interview guide may be asked as the researcher picked up on things said by the interviewee. But all questions in the interview guide will be asked and will be formulated in a similar way (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The interview process is thus flexible and emphasis is on how the

interviewee frames and understands issues and events. In this study, I had a clear focus of investigation, so semi-structured interviews were preferred over unstructured interviews so that the more specific issues could be addressed. Thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed and analyzed. This falls in the field of descriptive research and does not allow for statistical testing.

The research issues provided will not be the only areas discussed during the interviews. As has been argued by several researchers, during interviews the focus will be on the subjective meaning and understanding of each interviewee and the research issues will only be raised as probes towards the end of the interview if topics have not been discussed in the earlier unstructured discussion (Perry 1998; Patton 1992). Byrne (2004) suggests that qualitative interviewing is particularly useful for assessing individuals' attitudes and values, things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal survey. Open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees' views, understandings, experiences and opinions. Byrne (2004) also suggests that 'qualitative interviewing has been particularly attractive to researchers who want to explore voices and experiences, which they believe have been ignored, misrepresented or suppressed in the past'. Older employees with an average low occupational status have been studied only to a small extent and can therefore be considered a population whose voices and experiences have not been explored fully.

A key-feature of in-depth interviews is that it intends to combine structure with flexibility and that the interview is interactive in nature (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Probes are used to achieve depth in terms of penetration, exploration and explanation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Lastly, the interview is generative in the sense that new knowledge or thoughts are likely to be created (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The interview is a powerful method to collect data. It gives the opportunity to ask for explanations if an answer is vague or to provide clarification if a question is not clear to the interviewee (Silverman, 2011). Open-ended interviews give also rich and detailed information about the issues under study (Mason, 2002). However, interviews also have some disadvantages. First of all, the risk of interviewer effects on responses on the interviewee (Mason, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Such effects might be less pronounced in telephone interviews, but even verbally the researcher might influence the responses (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Also, telephone

interviews must be brief and require short answers, because people can lose patience. Another limitation created by telephone interviews concerns the lack of body language and facial expressions which play important roles in human communication (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Also, people who do not own or who are not contactable by telephone can not be interviewed (Bryman & Bell, 2007), although nowadays basically everyone has a telephone in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2007). Despite these limitations, telephone interviews were preferred over face-to-face interviews for financial and logistic reasons.

There are several advantages of telephone interviews versus face-to-face interviews. Telephone interviews are cheaper and quicker to administer (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Telephone interviewing provides more reliable evidence (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In face-to-face interviews, interviewees' replies can be affected by characteristics of the interviewer and by his/her mere presence. Interviews by telephone remove this potential source of bias to a significant extent.

A second 'instrument' concerns the role of researcher. A characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is a key instrument (Mason, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Qualitative research is interpretative research, with the inquirer involved in a sustained and intensive experience with interviewees. This introduces a range of strategic, ethical and personal issues into the qualitative research process. Although a protocol was used to conduct interviews, the researcher is the one who actually gathers the information. Furthermore, qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry, with the researcher interpreting what has been told by the interviewees (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Silverman, 2011). Reflexivity is thus an important aspect of qualitative research (Mason, 2002). Mason (2002) argues that the reviewer's relationship with the interviewees influences the process and reflecting on this is necessary. I realize how my own background and assumptions have indeed influenced the flow of each interview. As in daily life, I 'got along' more or less well with each interviewee. I understood an interviewee well or less well, based on my own experiences. Although I had the intention to treat each interviewee identically, it must have been impossible to set aside completely my own personality, values, experiences and background. This means that the way I conducted the interviews, the way I felt about it, the way I interpreted it and reflected on it are biased in some way. Different information would have been obtained with another interviewer, the emphasis of some issues would have been on other aspects and this is all the result of who I am and my interaction with each interviewee. It is important to recognize this

and it is useful to provide information about the characteristics of the researcher who conducted the interviews.

At the time of the data collection, the researcher was self-described as a white, Dutch, 26 year old, middle class married female with two daughters and a background in psychology and diversity management. Numerous preconceptions come along with these characteristics. It is useful to note that the interviewees in the present study had a relatively low level of education and low socioeconomical status. This was in sharp contrast with the upbringing and education of the researcher who had been in little contact with persons from lower social classes. I sometimes felt a cultural clash, not understanding their reflections or behaviors, since it is such a far cry from the types of behaviors, experiences and reflections I have seen myself around me. Furthermore, the researcher had no knowledge about the sectors in which the interviewees were working. It can be argued that this is a strength because the interviewees truly have to explain themselves without assuming that the researcher knows what they mean.

Lastly, the interviews were conducted, transcribed and analyzed in Dutch. Only the later stages of the data analysis and the profiles of all the interviewees have been translated into English in order to be transparent for non-Dutch readers of this thesis. This translation was also performed by the researcher, adding possible biases. Although it would have been better that an outsider would have done the translation, this option was not feasible due to financial constraints.

4.2.2 Sampling

With my research proposal ready I started contacting different companies and organizations explaining the purpose of the study and the request to participate. I did this to make sure that someone would be interested in participating in the study and therefore having enough respondents and interviewees to respectively fill out my survey and to interview. The knowledge centre for the creative industry in the Netherlands, called the GOC, replied positively to this request and asked if I would be interested in working with the trade union of this industry since they were currently working on their policy for older employees. This knowledge centre offers training in the creative industry in the Netherlands and also conducts research. Table 4.1 shows the characteristics of the sample of the qualitative study and compares this with the characteristics of the sample of the quantitative study and, where possible, with all members of the trade union FNV-KIEM as a whole. The table shows that the

percentages in the qualitative, quantitative and population as a whole are fairly similar overall, although sometimes no information about certain characteristics were available from the trade union.

Table 4.1: Characteristics qualitative study in comparison with the quantitative study and population of the trade union as a whole.

	In the qualitative study	In the quantitative study	In the trade union as a whole
Age range	47-59	45-63	14-100
Average age	53	53	55
Gender	80% male, 20% female	68% male, 32% female	73,5% male, 26,5% female
Self-employed	10%	0,7% (unclean data 8,9%)	16%
Average ISCO rang	2,13	2,65	No information available
Rang 1	20%	10,2%	No information available
Rang 2	53,3%	34,9%	No information available
Rang 3	20%	24,2%	No information available
Rang 4	6,7%	30,7%	No information available
Nationality	97% Dutch	97% Dutch	No information available
Audiovisual sector	7%	10%	9%
Arts sector	10%	22%	33%
Graphical sector	44%	44%	35%
Prepublishing sector	10%	2%	2%
Packaging sector	3%	8%	7%
Publishers	13%	14%	14%
Other sector	13%	0%	0%
Marital status	No information available	77% married, 33% single/widow	No information available
Job status	77% fulltime, 33% part-time	70% fulltime, 30% part-time	No information available
Elementary school	13%	4%	No information available
Lower general secondary education	24%	26%	No information available
Higher General Secondary Education	10%	10%	No information available
Pre-university education	7%	3%	No information available
Intermediate Vocational Education	33%	27%	No information available
Higher Vocational Education	13%	22%	No information available
University	0%	9%	No information available

It is important to explain the different educational levels in the Netherlands. At the age of 12 people do a test and are advised to go into different paths, leading to three different High School diploma's that then give access to either University, Higher Vocational Education or Intermediate Vocational Education. This selection is based

on intellectual capacities, but also on interests, motivation and personality. The University-path takes 6 years, the Higher Vocational Education 5 years and the Intermediate Vocational Education 4 years after the age of 12. This system means that individuals on the university-path who never obtain their diploma, still have validated a certain number of years, allowing them to enter for example Intermediate Vocational Education.

University level leads in general to intellectual jobs like architects, falling into category 4. Higher Vocational Education strives to find a balance between theory and practice, it is more practical than University, but also uses theories. With this educational level, one can become a teacher, an artist or an engineer for example. They will fall in general in category 3. Intermediate Vocational Education leads to jobs that are very practical in nature. Technology installers, hairdressers and electronics mechanics belong to this category, but also printers and prepressers. This is a mix category three and 4. Pre-university is the High School level that prepares someone to go to University, Higher General Secondary Education prepares individuals to get a Higher Vocational Education and Lower General Secondary Education leads to Intermediate Vocational Education. However, not having done any studies after High School leads to jobs with a lower occupational status, usually rang 1 or 2, depending on which pre-higher education path an individual is in. Individuals with a pre-university obtaining more often rang 2 and ones preparing for Intermediate Vocational Education more often a rank 1. Individuals with only elementary school can only do rang 1 occupations, since this is considered “no education”. Examples here are cleaners and helpers in offices. However, it is important not to overstate the link between educational level and occupational status, since the education system in the Netherlands is fluid, which means that individuals can quite easily switch from one educational path to another and that moving up to a university-level job is possible even for people with a low initial educational background based on experience, training and motivation.

For the qualitative study I received an excel document with the names, date of birth and telephone numbers of the members of the trade union. Interviewees under the age of 45 were removed and interviewees were phoned randomly. Thirty people were interviewed. Interviewees were between 47 and 59 years old (average 53.2 years), which is close to the average age of 55 in the trade union as a whole. 80% of the interviewees were male, compared to 73,5% in the total population under study. No information about educational background was available from the trade union, so

no comparison can be made. 77% of the interviewees worked full-time and 33% worked part time. Here again, no data were available on this percentage in the trade union database. Due to the small percentage of part-time working employees, no comparison could be made between full- and part-time working employees. No information was obtained about the sector/industry the interviewees were working in, their organization or nationality.

The most common sampling technique used in qualitative research is purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In a non-probability sample units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features within the sampled population. The sample is not intended to be statistically representative: the chances of selection are unknown and the characteristics of the population are used as the basis for selection. It is this feature that makes them well-suited for small-scale in-depth studies (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

However, since a list with only surnames and telephone numbers of employees of 45 years or above was provided, the researcher was unable to use purposive sampling, as no other characteristics were available to the researcher. Gender could not be guessed based on names, since only surnames were provided. The only selection-criterion was age: only employees over the age of 45 were phoned. The researcher is aware of the fact that probability sampling is inappropriate for qualitative research since this type of research does not set out to estimate the incidence of phenomena in the wider population (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). This has some important implications, since purposive sampling would probably have resulted in richer information that contains all the possible variation that can be found based on different demographic characteristics of the interviewees, like gender, organizational tenure or educational level. It is unknown if some subgroups of the population would bring contrasting or complementary insights. Furthermore, a list of interviewees was obtained through the trade union, which means that other older employees working in the creative industry but who gave up their membership of the trade union might differ in important ways from those who kept their membership.

Regarding sample size, it should be mentioned that qualitative samples are usually small (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The number of interviews to be conducted in this thesis was not determined beforehand. However, after 30 interviews there was a point of saturation (Creswell, 2009) where little new information was obtained and where similar patterns came back. Researchers have argued that there is a point

where little new information is obtained from further interviews (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As a consequence, it was decided to stop after having conducted 30 interviews.

4.2.3 Design

Semi-structured in-depth interviews by telephone were used. No pilot study was conducted. A list with all members of the trade union of the creative industry, FNV-KIEM was received on 02.06.09. Afterwards, the employees were contacted by telephone by the researcher to schedule an appointment and were then re-phoned by the researcher at the time that suited the interviewee. The interviews covered a 2-months period (02.06.09 – 03.08.09). The interviews were transcribed by the researcher between 03.06.09-21.09.09.

The questions of the interviews were open-ended, for example ‘Can you tell me something about your perception of respect at your organization?’ The precise questions and the interview protocol can be found in appendix 3.

In total 73 telephone calls were made, of which 23 were absent, 4 no longer worked in the sector and 16 did not wish to participate. The relatively high response rate of 41.9% may be explained by the fact that interviewees had some intrinsic interest in the study and trust the centre to which the study has been linked. This centre, GOC, deals with personnel development in the creative industry. It offers training to employees working in these industries and many interviewees in this study had followed one or more courses.

The interview protocol included instructions for the researcher to follow in order to ask the same questions to each interviewee. The interview protocol was based on the literature review on the topic. First demographic information was asked (gender, age, educational level, job status). Then an easy question was asked to break the ice and get the interviewee talking followed by the topics of this study and probes for each question to make interviewees explain their answers in more detail or elaborate on their ideas. A distinction can be made between two types of questions: content mapping and content mining (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Content mapping questions are designed to identify dimensions, like which HR practices are available, while content mining aims at exploring issues in more detail like the research issue about which factors influence the retirement decision of the interviewees. Other techniques used to achieve depth were to listen carefully and remember what has been said to be able to probe and summarize in other words what has been said to

verify if the interpretation of the researcher was correct or needed adjustment, emphasizing there were no right or wrong answers, express interest and attention and give the interviewee enough time to reply (Silverman, 2011). An unforeseen way to get the interviewees talking was asking the same question several times in different ways, leading each time to new and complementary insights and information. Leading questions were avoided and questions were formulated in such a way they were understandable for the population under study (Mason, 2002). It became apparent that the researcher had to formulate the questions in a very easy way for the interviewees to understand them. To conclude the interviewee was thanked for his/her time and explained that the results of this study would be published by the trade union in a year's time. A report was written about the results of the study for the board of the trade union and an article outlining the main findings has been posted on the website of the trade union that is available to all members.

All interviews were recorded with a recorder. Heritage (1984) suggests the following advantages of recording and transcribing interviews: it helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories; it allows more thorough examination; it permits repeated examination; it opens up the data to public scrutiny by other researchers; and it allows the data to be reused in other ways. During the interview the researcher also made notes about intonations, hesitations and other important verbal cues. Taking notes during the interview is extremely important (Mason, 2002). Not only because tape recorders can malfunction (Bryman & Bell, 2007), but also because hesitations, silences and intonation add to the understanding of what is said (Mason, 2002). Right after the interview a short impression and reflection of the overall interview was written indicating if the interview went smoothly or not, if the interviewee was talkative or if the researcher had to probe significantly to get the interviewee talking (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Silverman, 2011). This also concerns the relationship I had with each interviewee, which is an important question in terms of reflexivity (Mason, 2002). Indeed, the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee influences the way an interview went and an understanding of this relationship is therefore important (Mason, 2002).

4.2.4 Analysis of the data

The data have been analyzed in two rounds. The first step used content analysis in which the aim was to identify issues for older employees and to identify those HR practices that seemed to apply to older employees. Here, word-frequency counting

has been used. Content analysis entails inspection of the data for recurrent instances of some kind (Wilkinson, 2011). The following stages have been followed in this study to do a word-frequency counting. First I decided to look at each interview individually, developed a coding system and applied the codes systematically across the transcripts. I then made a table counting the instances of codes, reporting them both in numbers and in percentages. This table can be found in appendix 4.

This first round of analysis aimed at forming a basis to construct the survey for the quantitative study. More precisely, it determined which HR practices would be included in the quantitative study. After having conducted and analyzed the quantitative data, I found only weak support for the proposed model. As such, a second round of analysis of the qualitative study was conducted. This time, hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1775; Heidegger, 1962) was used in order to find explanations for the findings obtained in the quantitative study. This way of analyzing the data was used to be able to dig deeper, read between the lines and go beyond what was said by the interviewees. The context was taken into account and deeper meanings and explanations of what had been said were identified. The average lower occupational status of the employees made that these employees often had problems putting into words their thoughts. They had difficulties expressing themselves and lots of probing, guidance and summarizing by the interviewer was necessary to go to a deeper level. In other words, this round of analysis tried to make sense of what had been said, going beyond the surface meaning of the words used.

The data analysis of qualitative research is inductive in nature, however, the various steps are interrelated and going back and forth through the different stages is necessary to fully explore and analyze the data set. Hereunder the various steps are described. The first step was to organize and prepare the data for an analysis by transcribing the interviews.

The second step involved reading all the transcribed interviews to get a general sense of the information and get an idea about its overall meaning. The first impressions, ideas, questions and remarks were written down for further examination at a later stage. Initial themes or concepts were identified.

The third step involves coding. Coding has been defined as the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). In other words, categories were developed and data falling into these categories were put together. Reading the transcripts a second time allowed for the emergence of new themes and categories and some

categories were grouped together or split up. In other words, a constant comparative analytical scheme was used, involving unitizing and categorizing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985): the text was broken into units of information that served as the basis for defining categories and then these units were brought together into provisional categories that related to the same content. Some categories were expected based on previous studies, others were not anticipated. Constructivists believe that induction should be used exclusively in analyzing qualitative data. In other words, themes should emerge from the data and not be determined beforehand (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, Huberman and Miles (1994) argue that both induction and deduction can be used to analyze qualitative data. They state that one can start with a predetermined set of themes or categories (deduction) or get gradually to them (induction). It is important to note here that the coding part was conducted with another researcher (a PhD student), so the inter-coder reliability could be established. This will be explained in section 4.2.7: Inter-coder reliability.

In the fourth step of the coding process major themes were identified, all including multiple perspectives and supported by diverse quotations. Data were summarized or synthesized, which is the final step of data management (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) starting with distilling the essence of the evidence for later representation. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) point to different levels of coding. First there is basic coding while a second level comprises more awareness of the content of what is said. Themes reflected the language the interviewee used. The third level moved slightly away from a close association with what the interviewee said and towards a concern with broad analytic themes. Although coding is a widely accepted practice in the research community, it also has been criticized for the possibility to lose the context of what has been said. Coding may also result in a fragmentation of data, losing the narrative flow of what people say (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Here, the various parts of the research diary as briefly mentioned on page 101 also comes into play. By going back and forth between the transcripts and the coding book, it was important not to lose sight of the context in which things had been said. As such, part of the research diary, or more precisely the observational and methodological notes, were consulted to see if the researcher had to probe a lot to get a certain answer and what the context of each individual was, like for example a recent lay-off.

Step five is about identifying elements and dimensions, refining categories and classifying data at a higher level of abstraction (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The

main task here was to display data in a way that is conceptually pure, making distinctions that are meaningful and provide interesting content. There are two types of content analysis: manifest and latent (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The distinction between the two refers to the difference between the surface meaning of a text and the underlying meaning of that narrative. To summarize, manifest content refers to the surface meaning of a text while latent content refers to the underlying meaning of that narrative (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In this study we look at latent content analysis, because the context in which issues are discussed are important and influences how one should interpret the findings (Mason, 2002).

In the sixth step patterns were identified and clustered. Here, a detailed discussion of several themes, complete with subthemes, specific illustrations, multiple perspectives from different interviewees and quotations were provided as well as a discussion that interconnects themes.

The last step involves interpreting the data. Here, the findings obtained from the study were linked to the literature, previous studies and the quantitative part of the present study. Triangulation was used here. Explanations of the findings and new suggestions for future research were given. Another part of the research diary, the analytic memo and the theoretical note, were used here. In the analytic memo recurrent patterns in the data were written down after each interview and a link with the existing body of literature was made, so all this information was useful to conduct this last step in the analysis. The theoretical note contained notes about the different theories that could be useful in explaining the findings also came in handy.

4.2.5 Validity

Reliability, validity and generalizability do not have the same meaning in qualitative research as in quantitative research. Hereunder the three issues will be discussed in the light of the qualitative study.

Validity is the extent to which an instrument truly measures what it is supposed to measure. In qualitative research this concept relates more to the validity of representation, understanding and interpretation (Mason, 2002). Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for accuracy of findings by employing certain procedures (Creswell, 2009). There is internal and external validity. Internal validity indicates whether you investigate what you claim to investigate (Arksey & Knight, 1999). External validity deals with the extent to which the abstract constructs generated are applicable to other groups within the population (LeCompte & Goetz,

1982) or to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other terms are often used to refer to what is called validity in quantitative research. These terms are trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Several strategies have been identified (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Mason, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) to increase validity. Triangulation, comparing data obtained by qualitative and quantitative research methods was used in the present study: cross-checking the findings from different sources add to the validity (Mason, 2002). A rich, thick, detailed description was used to convey the findings, making findings more realistic (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Low inference description was adopted, using direct quotes of the interviewees. Negative case sampling was used, allowing for discrepant information, which is known to make information more realistic and more valid (Mason, 2002). Moreover, the process of data collection and analysis was explained in a detailed and transparent way (Mason, 2002) and careful retracing and reconstruction of the process has been presented. Furthermore, in line with Yin's (2003) suggestions regarding validity all steps of the procedures have been documented. Also, another PhD student not familiar with the topic was asked to act as a devil's advocate, challenging me to provide evidence for the way I conducted and analyzed the qualitative study, also enhancing the validity. Lastly, the bias that the researcher brings to the study has been discussed.

4.2.6 Reliability

Reliability is often defined as the extent to which measures of the same phenomenon are consistent and repeatable (Mason, 2002).

However, reliability in qualitative research does not have the same meaning as it has in quantitative research and a variety of views exists on this matter. Some researchers have argued that replication in qualitative research is naïve since the phenomena under study are often very complex and context-bound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Others state this type of research is dynamic and responsive in nature making it impossible to replicate (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Different terms have been used to refer to the broad concept of reliability. Trustworthiness (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), consistency (Robson, 2002) and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are frequently preferred over the term reliability and has the meaning of soundness in its broadest sense. Reliability depends on the likely recurrence of the data and the way they are interpreted. In order to obtain reliable results, suggestions by Gibbs (2007) have been followed. Transcripts were checked for obvious mistakes made during the

transcription phase and data and codes were constantly compared, so a shift in meaning of the codes during the process of coding is unlikely. Also, sufficient information about the research process was provided (Perakyla, 1997).

4.2.7 Inter-coder reliability

After the previous section on reliability in qualitative research in general, this section will deal with how inter-coder reliability was established and why this is important. Inter-rater or inter-coder reliability is important to establish since the analysis of qualitative data can be enhanced by an independent assessment of transcripts by other researchers and comparing agreement between the coders (Mays & Pope, 1995), which is a standard procedure in qualitative research (Armstrong et al., 1997; Mays & Pope, 2000). Establishing inter-coder reliability is an attempt to reduce the error and bias generated when individuals take shortcuts when processing the voluminous amount of transcripts. Since different coders may vary in their interpretation of a text's content, a systematic coding process, consistently used by each coder, should be more reliable compared with a process where each coder uses his or her own methods (Miles & Huberman 1994; MacQueen, McLelland, & Milstein 1998). In this study a friend researcher, a psychology PhD student in the Netherlands, was the other coder. For his PhD I will act as the other coder also. The process can be broken down in several steps (Hruschka, Schwartz, Cobb St John, Picone-Decaro, Jenkins & Carey, 2004): segmentation of text, codebook creation, coding, assessment of reliability, codebook modification, and final coding. In the first step, segmentation of text, codes were applied to meaningful units of the transcripts. In the second step, codebook creation, an initial codebook was drafted. Both coders independently coded part of the data and proposed a set of themes. Afterwards the two different themes were discussed and together a codebook was constructed. The codebook can be found in appendix 10. In the third step, a process of coding, reliability assessment, discussion between the two coders, making modifications to the codebook and recoding started. This was an iterative process, going forth and back. After the coding process, the inter-coder or inter-rater reliability was calculated in order to see to what degree the texts were consistently coded by the two different coders. In order to avoid chance agreement (Neumark-Sztainer & Story 1997), Cohen's Kappa was used (Cohen, 1960). Cohen's kappa was calculated by hand. First the agreement coefficient was calculated, which is the percentage of agreement in coding between the two coders. However, this percentage

is inflated because it does not take into account agreement obtained by chance. This agreement obtained by chance was computed. The percentage of agreement obtained by chance was removed from the observed agreement and this number was divided by 1 minus the percentage of agreement based on chance. The kappa measure can range from 1 to negative values no less than -1, with 1 signaling perfect agreement and 0 indicating agreement no better than chance. Different criteria have been developed to assess Cohen's Kappa (Hruschka et al., 2004). Landis and Koch (1977) proposed that 0.81–1.00 =almost perfect; 0.61–0.80 =substantial; 0.41–0.60 =moderate; 0.21–0.40 = fair; 0.00–0.20 = slight; and < 0.00 = poor. Cicchetti (1994) proposed the following: 0.75–1.00 = excellent; 0.60–0.74 = good; 0.40–0.59 = fair; and < 0.40 = poor. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that inter-coder reliability should approach 0.90. In this study, low initial inter-coder reliability was obtained. The reliability varied from research issue to issues, with questions that had many codes like research issue five having a lower inter-coder reliability than questions that were easier to code because of fewer possible codes to choose from. Also, it was decided that some segments of texts could belong to more than one theme and code. Different rounds were necessary to obtain an inter-coder reliability that was considered sufficient. The cut-off point used in this study was .80. However, with initial inter-coder reliabilities of .38-.57, two to 6 rounds were necessary to get reliabilities of .80 or more. Since inter-coder reliability was insufficient in the beginning of the coding, the two coders discussed the problems, clarified issues and modified the codebook. The coders were coding the texts again and the process was repeated until sufficient inter-coder agreement was achieved (Miles & Huberman 1994; MacQueen, McLelland, & Milstein 1998). When reliabilities of .80 or more were achieved, the final step was to code all the interviews according to the agreed codebook. After having done half of the interviews, inter-coder reliability was calculated again to make sure that there was continuity. It was not necessary at this stage to modify the codebook, since all reliabilities were above .80. The inter-coder reliability for each code was computed at the end and ranged from .81 to .94.

4.2.8 Trustworthiness and authenticity

After the discussion on validity and reliability in qualitative research, it is important to note that some writers have suggested that qualitative studies should be evaluated according to different criteria. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and

assessing the quality of qualitative research. They propose the criteria trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria, each of which has an equivalent criterion in quantitative research: credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability), and confirmability (paralleling objectivity). The use of reliability and validity in qualitative research presupposes that a single absolute account of social reality exists, while not everyone agrees to this (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Credibility is established when the research is carried out properly and when the findings are submitted to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the researcher has correctly understood that social world, which has been done in this study by the use of triangulation with the results of the quantitative study. Also, the findings have been confirmed by the interviewees by summarizing after each topic in the conversation what the interviewee has said, asking the interviewee if this interpretation/summary was correct in their eyes. I have not given a copy to the interviewees to check, since it was considered that summarizing several times during the interview what has been said and checking the accuracy immediately with the interviewees gives the same information.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized on transferred to other contexts and settings. Geertz (1973) has used the term thick description to refer to rich accounts of the details of a culture. Thick description provides others with what Guba and Lincoln (1994) refer to as a database for making judgments about the possible transferability of findings.

Dependability is the equivalent of reliability and is concerned with whether we would obtain the same results if we could observe the same thing twice. Since it is impossible to measure the same thing twice, it emphasizes the need to take into account how the context changes and how this influences the way a study is approached. Dependability is dealt with by including a chapter on context in this thesis.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. A devil's advocate and negative case sampling have been used to enhance the confirmability.

4.2.9 Generalizability

The basis for representational generalisation in qualitative research is very different from quantitative research. Qualitative research can not be generalised on a statistical

basis. It is the range of views, answers and experiences that can be inferred to the wider population (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Although different answers would have been obtained with another sample of this population, it is at the level of categories, concepts and explanations that generalisations can be made (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Often qualitative research does not intend to generalize the findings beyond the interviewees of those under study (Silverman, 2011). It has been argued that qualitative research is more or less the opposite of generalization as it is about particular themes in a particular context (Mason, 2002). Greene and Caracelli (1997) state therefore that one should talk about particularity instead of generalizability.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) have identified three distinct concepts of generalization. Representational generalization deals with the question of whether what is found in a sample can be generalized to the population from which the sample was drawn. Inferential generalization deals with the question whether the findings can be generalized to other settings or contexts beyond the sampled one (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Theoretical generalization draws theoretical propositions, principles or statements from findings for a more general application (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Regarding theoretical generalization one can look at the degree to which data support existing theories, which in turn can lead to the refinement of those theories to incorporate some aspects of the findings. Here, the findings will be compared to the results of the quantitative study and to previous studies, which will be discussed in the discussion section of this thesis.

In order to allow other researchers to judge the inferential generalizability or transferability of the results, thick description will be used. Thick description means to provide sufficient detail of the original data to allow others to gauge and assess meanings attached to them (Geertz, 1973). It is expected that this will be sufficient for other researchers to decide on the level of inferential generalizability to other contexts or populations.

Representational generalizability depends on two issues: the accuracy with which the data have been collected and interpreted and the degree to which the sample is representative of the population sampled (Mason, 2002, Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Since random sampling is used here and the sample size is small, it might be that representational generalizability is fairly weak in this study. Indeed, qualitative research often involves small samples which are not statistically representative as is the case in the present study. However, it should be stressed that the data obtained with qualitative methods is different in nature and richer in terms of interviewees'

insights and realities (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Representational generalisation is important in the sense that if findings are only relevant to the sample of a study, one can not draw conclusions and build recommendations on such a study. Several researchers have argued that complementary research, preferably quantitative research, should complement a qualitative study to be able to generalize the results to the wider population under study (Hammersley, 1996; Seale, 1999), which has been done in this study.

4.2.10 Ethical considerations

The in-depth nature of qualitative research and the fact that it raises issues that might be unforeseen mean that ethical considerations are extremely important in qualitative research (Silverman, 2011). Several stances on research ethics can be distinguished (Bryman & Bell, 2007). A first stance is universalism. A universalist stance takes the view that ethical precepts should never be broken. Infractions of ethical principles are wrong in a moral sense and are damaging to social research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Fletcher (1966) has argued to look at ethical issues on a case-by-case basis, calling it situation ethics. Based on situation ethics, researchers are arguing for a certain amount of flexibility in ethical decision making. Others have observed that almost all research involves elements that are at least ethically questionable, for example if participants are not informed about all study details.

Discussions about ethical principles in research tend to revolve around four main areas (Diener & Crandall, 1978): harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. Harm can entail a number of facets: physical harm, harm to participants' development or self-esteem, stress, harm to career prospects or future employment and inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts (Diener & Crandall, 1978). It seems highly unlikely that participants of this study have experienced any form of harm. Secondly, informed consent means that prospective research participants should be given as much information as might be needed to make an informed decision whether or not they wish to participate in a study (Silverman, 2011). In practice it is difficult to present prospective participants with absolutely all information required to make an informed decision (Homan, 1991), like for example the underestimation of the amount of time an interview is likely to take or not providing all details about one's research fearing to contaminating people's answers to questions (Homan, 1991). In the present study I have tried to give all information about the study so that people

could make an informed decision about their participation. It was stressed that participation was not compulsory, but voluntary. The third ethical concern is about the invasion of privacy that is considered unacceptable (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Silverman, 2011). As was true for informed consent, here again covert methods are usually deemed to be violations of the privacy principle on the grounds that participants are not being given the opportunity to refuse invasions of their privacy. It was explained to the interviewees that the results will be published and that quotations might be used. However, it was explained that their names will not be mentioned. It was also made clear that the interview would be recorded and afterwards transcribed by the researcher. Copies of the interviews were not offered to the interviewees for them to check for accuracy, because this has been checked several times during the interview by summarizing in my own words what had been said and asking them to tell me if this was indeed the way they meant it. As such, this way of checking for accuracy has been considered similar to giving interviewees a copy of the interview at the end. When people agreed to be interviewed, they could still refuse to answer certain questions on whatever grounds they feel were justified. It is likely that these refusals will be based on feelings that questions are too sensitive or personal. Lastly, deception occurs when researchers represent their research as something other than what it is (Mason, 2002). Deception in various degrees is probably quite widespread in much research, because researchers often want to limit participants' understanding of what the research is about so that they respond more naturally (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, this is especially true for experiments and less so for telephone interviews. In this study I have clearly explained the purpose of this study. My research proposal has not been through an ethical commission as in the Netherlands it would not fall under the legal prerequisites to do so (Wet Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek).

Kvale (2007) stated that interviewing in qualitative research is increasingly being seen as a moral inquiry, so one should consider how the interview will improve the human situation. In this study, older employees will benefit from participating since their perceptions, experiences and explanations will be the basis on which recommendations will be formulated for the trade union in order to create a workplace that takes the needs and wishes of older employees into account.

4.2.11 Limitations

Although the limitations have been outlined and explained throughout this chapter, the main limitations are listed briefly here as a summary.

A first limitation concerns the sampling frame, since simple random sampling was used instead of the more appropriate purposive sampling as explained above. A second limitation concerns the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews by telephone, since the lack of visuals and real human contact implies missing out on some important information. Another drawback is the important role of the researcher in the analysis of qualitative data. Although the process of data analysis has been explained and described in detail and the inter-coder reliability has been established, the fact that the researcher collects and interprets the data brings some biases to this process.

4.3 Quantitative procedures

The last part of this chapter will deal with the methodology of the quantitative study. The form of the survey will be presented, then the pre-test will be discussed and finally the procedures will be outlined.

4.3.1 Form of survey

This study has a survey design. Fink (1995) has identified four types: self-administered surveys, interviews, structured record reviews and structured observations. In this study self-administered surveys were used since the nature of the information sought, perceptions of participants, does not lend itself to structured record reviews or observations. Participants received a paper-survey by post at their home addresses and could fill it out whenever they wished to, so in complete privacy and with control over their progress (Richman et al, 1999).

2500 surveys were sent out by the knowledge centre of the creative industry GOC. Participants were asked to complete the survey and send it back to this knowledge centre with a response envelope provided, no deadline was mentioned. Some questions in the survey were not analyzed for this thesis, but were added for the trade union. These questions (section G and H in the survey in appendix 2) were analyzed only for the trade union. The results on these items do not influence the answers on the scales of interest in this thesis.

Self-completion surveys were used because of the absence of interviewer effects and interviewer variability. Surveys were also considered more convenient for

respondents since they can complete the survey when and where they want. However, they present also some disadvantages. First, there is no one present to help respondents if they are having difficulty answering a question and there is no opportunity to probe respondents to elaborate on an answer, although this is especially the case in open-ended questions and therefore applies less to the present study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Secondly, respondents can become tired of answering questions that are not very salient to them. No option was given to the participants to show that a certain question did not apply to them, but I argue that participants will simply skip questions that do not apply to them. Moreover, respondents are able to read the whole survey before answering the first question. If this happens, questions are no longer independent of one another. Although this problem could have overcome by the use of an online survey where you can opt for not allowing participants to go back to previous questions, a survey by post was considered more appropriate for the population under study. By the use of paper survey, even very old participants were reached, since internet connection and use declines with age (Statistics Netherlands, 2007). Furthermore, with postal survey, one can never be sure that the right person has answered the survey (Bryman & Bell, 2007), but since the participants have an intrinsic interest in filling out the survey, it is very likely that this has been the case. Moreover, there is a greater risk of missing data. Partially answered surveys are more likely, because of a lack of prompting or supervision. This limitation was dealt with by limiting the length of the survey, by explaining the questions and by the use of an accompanying letter and two follow-up letters.

4.3.2 Instruments

The survey can be found in appendix 2 and was made up of several parts as is depicted in the table below.

Table 4.2: Scales and number of items in the survey

Scale	Number of items	References
Flexible work options	4	Armstrong-Stassen, 2008
Job design	4	Armstrong-Stassen, 2008
Training	4	Saba & Guerin, 2005
Performance evaluation	3	Saba & Guerin, 2005
Recognition and respect	3	Armstrong-Stassen, 2008
Organizational commitment	16	Meyer & Allen, 1991
Job performance	3	Schoorman & Mayer, 2008
Retirement preference	2	Zappala et al., 2008

The different scales that will be discussed in more detail are: perceived quality of HR practices, organizational commitment, job performance and preference for early retirement. The scales related to occupational commitment, age discrimination and demographic information were removed from the analysis as a result of a Cronbach alpha below .70 or because this information was only used and analyzed for internal purposes of the trade union.

Perceived quality of HR practices refers to how one perceives the quality of the provision of HR practices (positive-negative continuum). This study uses a mix of items used in two previous studies (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Saba & Guerin, 2005). HR practices under study are flexible work options (4 items), job design (4 items), training (4 items), performance evaluation (3 items), and recognition and respect (3 items). Respondents were presented with the list of HR practices and asked to indicate their perception of the quality of the provision of these HR practices in their organization on a 5-point Likert scale (1: very bad; 5: very good; see appendix 2). This scale was developed by the researcher and is based on the outcomes of the qualitative study and the literature review. The two sources gave similar results. HR practices used here have thus all been used previously, but never all together in one and the same study. The table below compares the formulation of the questions in previous studies with the way it was formulated in this study.

Table 4.3: Original questions as used in previous studies versus the questions as formulated in this study.

Original question	Question as formulated in this study
Do the following HR practices exist or not? (Saba & Guerin, 2005)	How do you perceive the quality of the provision of the following possibilities and facilities within the organization where you work? (5-points Likert-scale)
To what extent is the organization engaging in each HR practice (Armstrong-stassen, 2008)	
Flexible hours	The possibility to have flexible working hours (days/hours)
Part-time work	The possibility to work a reduced work week (part-time)
Share work with another colleague	The possibility to share a full-time job (job-sharing)
Work from home	The possibility to work from home
Special projects/challenging meaningful tasks	The provision of challenging and important assignments or special projects
New roles for mature employees	The creation of new positions for older employees
Reduced workload pressures and job demands	The possibility to transfer to a less stressful/strenuous job
Formal career plan	The provision of a career plan
Keep skills up-to-date	Training/education for older employees to keep their skills up-to-date
Training to learn new skills	Training/education for older employees to acquire new skills
Computer skills	The provision of new technologies that will help older employees to execute their job.
Same opportunities as young employees to be promoted/transfer.	The provision of the same opportunities for older and younger employees to get promoted or to be transferred
Unbiased performance appraisal	The provision of a fair performance appraisal (free from age bias)
Feedback on performance	Giving feedback to older employees about their functioning
Training evaluation	Giving feedback after having followed training
Incentives to continue employment	Offering incentives for continued employment.
Compensation linked to performance	The provision of compensation linked to performance

Extended vacations	Improving benefits by providing more vacation and additional time off.
Communication programs	The provision of a confident
Recognize experience, knowledge, skills and expertise	Recognizing the knowledge and expertise of older employees.
Ensure mature employees are treated with respect	Ensuring that older employees are treated with respect in the organization.
Show appreciation for a job well-done	Showing appreciation for a job well done.

The concept of organizational commitment has been defined in different ways by various researchers. The three mostly used measures of organizational commitment are the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), the British Organization Commitment Scale (BOCS) and the Organizational Commitment Scale (OCS). Meyer and Allen's (1991) Organizational Commitment Scale measures affective, normative and continuance commitment. Many researchers have used these three dimensions of organizational commitment (Baker & Ahmad, 2003) and it has received lots of support over the years (Dunham et al, 1994; McDonald & Makin, 2000; McGee & Ford, 1987). The standardized Dutch translation of Meyer et al.'s organizational commitment scale was used (De Gilder et al, 1997). Since the Revised Organizational Commitment Scale has been widely accepted by researchers, is mostly used and has been validated in the Netherlands, this study has chosen this instrument to measure affective and continuance organizational commitment. Some items were reverse coded.

Job performance can be measured in several ways, of which self-evaluation and supervisor-rating are the most commonly used. However, self-evaluation presents several sources of bias, like the social desirability bias (Conway, 2002). As a result, correlation between self- and supervisor ratings of performance is usually weak (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988). It has been suggested that the correlation between the two ways of measuring job performance can be increased by the use of a common perspective (Smirich & Chesser, 1981). Schoorman and Mayer (2008) showed that the correlation increased significantly from .38 to .88 by the use of a common perspective. They argue that one should ask respondents for their supervisor's assessment of their performance rather than for their own assessment to obtain a valid measurement of job performance. In line with their research, job performance was measured with three items in the present study. How would your supervisor rate your own performance? How would your supervisor's supervisor rate your own performance? How would your colleagues rate your own performance? A five-point Likert scale was used.

The preference for early retirement will be measured by comparing the difference between the answers of two questions: At what age would you like to

retire? At what age do you expect you could realistically retire? (Zappala et al, 2008). More precisely, the expected retirement age will be subtracted from the preferred retirement age and a negative outcome indicates a preference for early retirement. The higher this number the stronger the preference for early retirement. When asking people about their expected retirement age, it is assumed that people are knowledgeable enough to be able to give a valid answer. However, it should be borne in mind that retirement laws and financial issues related to pensions are often difficult for many to understand (Luchak & Gunderson, 2000; Tanner, 2000; Boeri, Borsch-Supan & Tabellini, 2001; Mayhew, 2001).

4.3.3 Likert scales

Perceived quality of HR practices, job performance and commitment are measured using Likert scales. Since there is no common standard accepted by the scientific community for the correct interpretation and analysis of Likert scale data and most research does treat Likert scale as if it was measured on interval level (Carifio & Perla, 2007; Glass, Peckham & Sanders, 1972; Rainer, McCollin & Fernanda Ramalhoto, 2007), this study will use multiple regression with data obtained with Likert scales. A 5-points Likert scale was chosen because this is the one most commonly used. The following table shows which scales have used Likert scales.

Table 4.4: Measurement scales

Scale	Measurement
Perceived quality of HR practices	5-points Likert scale
Organizational commitment	5-points Likert scale
Occupational commitment	5-points Likert scale
Job performance	5-points Likert scale
Age discrimination	5-points Likert scale
Retirement preference	Open question (fill in an age)
Demographic information	Open and multiple choice questions

4.3.4 Translation

The survey is made up of several scales all previously used in English. Only the organizational commitment scale has been used and validated in the Netherlands. The other scales have been translated using multiple translators and parallel translation. Douglas and Nijssen (2002) state that cross-national studies may be flawed through “borrowing” scales used in domestic studies, without examining their relevance and equivalence in other countries and contexts. Parallel translation has been advocated to be the most preferable method (Douglas & Craig, 2007). This has

the advantage of using people of different backgrounds and perspectives in a co-operative effort to improve the quality of translation and assess its accuracy. In this study three translators were used. The table below shows which scales have been translated

Table 4.5: Translation scales

Scale	Translation
Perceived quality of HR practices	Translated by researchers
Organizational commitment	Validated in Dutch previously
Occupational commitment	Translated by researchers
Job performance	Translated by researchers
Age discrimination	Translated by researchers
Retirement preference	Translated by researchers
Demographic information	Translated by researchers

4.3.5 Pre-test

A pre-test was conducted, given that all scales have been used in previous studies, a pilot study was considered unnecessary. A pre-test was conducted to see if the survey was clear and relevant, without conducting a statistical analysis. 40 participants received the first draft of the survey with the question to comment on the draft and see whether any questions were unclear to them. So they both filled out the survey as if they were a participant and they gave additional comments on its structure, lay-out, content and clarity. Simple random methods were used to identify these participants. The pre-test took place between 30.04.09-08.05.09. There was an accompanying letter that explained that this was a pre-test and that they were asked to critically look at the survey and give feedback about its format, structure, content and clearness. 16 surveys were returned after 8 days and analyzed in a qualitative manner. No statistical tests like Cronbach’s alpha were conducted. As a consequence, the comments from the participants of the pre-test were the source of analysis. Moreover, the results of the pre-test were discussed with the knowledge centre GOC and the trade union and it was in cooperation with these two institutions that decisions were made.

The pre-test informed subsequent research by asking if all HR practices presented seemed relevant to them, if the items were clear, if the lay-out was attractive, if the instructions were clear, if important issues were missing and any other comments they might have. Slight adaptations were made to increase the clarity of formulation of some items. Jargon was avoided and explained in simpler words, in order to allow everyone to understand it. For example, instead of asking if job-

sharing was possible, it was asked if it was possible to share a full-time job, putting the word job-sharing between brackets. It was checked that there was no linguistic ambiguity, that one question was asked in one item and leading questions were avoided (Goodwin, 2005). Fink's (1995) tips were also taken into account: opting for simplicity over complexity, using complete sentences, avoiding jargon, slang and colloquial expressions and negatively phrased questions. The model in this thesis did not change as a result of the pre-test. The old survey used in the pre-test can be found in appendix 5 and the differences with the final survey are highlighted.

4.3.6 Procedures

The study took place between 08.10.09 and 30.01.10.

2500 survey were sent out by the knowledge centre GOC. This knowledge centre GOC paid for the costs of the study that existed of printing the surveys and sending them out with a return-envelope provided. They also collected the filled out surveys and sent them to me. The trade union agreed with my initial research proposal and asked to add some questions in the survey to be analyzed for their own internal purposes. Some extra questions that were of interest of FNV KIEM were included in the survey and analyzed by the researcher. These questions were not included in the present study but were only analyzed for FNV KIEM. The variables that were included in this study for the trade union were about the policy and facilities for older employees. The way a participant answered these questions did not influence the other questions asked in the survey, nor did it have consequences for him or her personally at work. As such, I consider no influence of these questions to my research. The fully (translated) survey can be found in appendix 2. I have provided the trade union with two reports of the findings. One report about the results of the added questions especially included in the survey for the trade union and a second report about the results of the study reported in this thesis.

4.3.7 Profile participants

The population consists of employees aged 45 or above working in the creative industry in the Netherlands. The sample is thus stratified by age. The sample was taken from the database of the largest trade union in the sector, FNV KIEM. Until 2008, membership of this trade union was compulsory, so if the study would have been conducted in 2008 the sample would have been fully representative. The study was conducted in summer 2009, so although membership was no longer compulsory,

the obligation to be a member has been abolished only 6 months earlier making it likely that relatively many employees were still a member. Indeed, 88% continued their membership in 2009 compared to 2008 when membership was compulsory. 12% has given up their membership, while still being an employee in the sectors under study. As a result, the sample is somewhat biased, as will be discussed in section 4.3.9 on response bias. Simple random sampling is used here, as each member of the sample had an equal chance of being selected as member of the sample (Field, 2009).

The profile of the participants of the quantitative study are outlined in different tables and where possible compared with information of the population under study. Table 4.1 on page 106 compares the samples of the qualitative and quantitative study with the population of the trade union and table 2.5 on page 41 showed which percentage of members work in which sector within the creative industry and how this percentage relates to the percentage of participants of the quantitative study.

4.3.8 Response rate

2500 surveys were sent out and collected by the GOC and 460 surveys were returned of which 46 were eliminated as a result of more than two missing answers. Two follow-up letters were sent. The first follow-up letter was sent two weeks after the initial sending and a second follow-up letter one week later. After the initial sending of the survey 282 were returned, after the two follow-up letters this total increased to 460. A total of 414 surveys were used for the statistical analysis, which is a low response rate of 18.4% percent. Baruch and Brooks (2008) examined the response rates for surveys used in organizational research. They found that the average response rate for studies that utilized data collected from organizations was 35.7 percent with a standard deviation of 18.8. As such, my response rate of 18.4% falls within the lower end. The following advices to improve the response rate have been followed in this study: a good cover letter explaining the reasons for and importance of the research; the survey was accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope; individuals who have not replied have received two follow-up letters; clear instructions were given; the lay-out was attractive; and the survey began with questions more likely to be of interest to respondents (Dillman, 1983). It has been argued that there is little difference in magnitude of effects for samples obtained with low versus those with high response rates (Schalm & Kelloway, 2001).

4.3.9 Response bias

The use of surveys implies some response biases. The table below outlines the different types of bias and the way the researcher tried to partially overcome them.

Table 4.6: Types of response bias and the way they are dealt with.

Type of response bias	Dealt with by...
Usage frequency	Using a mixed methods design
Social desirability bias	Ensuring anonymity, mixed methods design, stating that it measures perceptions and that there are no right and wrong answers, use of meta-perspective for job performance
Response acquiescence	Reverse coding
Non-response bias	Intrinsic interest topic study, credibility sponsoring organization and follow-up letters
Self-selection	Not dealt with, acknowledged as weakness

First of all, the purpose of the study was explained in the accompanying letter. By explaining the purpose of the study, it is expected that older employees receiving the survey would develop a favorable attitude towards responding to the survey, since it is in their own interest to fill it out. Based on a framework developed by Appelbaum et al. (1998), which in turn based its framework on Hornback's (1971) work, one can argue that this favorable attitude towards responding to the survey leads to higher involvement and commitment and greater care for accuracy of responses. So if participants try hard to give accurate responses this has a positive influence on all types of the response bias.

One type of bias is usage frequency (Lee et al, 2009; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) that suggests that high frequency events tend to be underreported and low frequency events tend to be over-reported because they are more distinctive (Saunders et al, 2009). This type of response bias could play a role regarding perceived quality of HR practices. Someone with many flexible work options might under-report this, since it is provided on a daily basis. However, a participant who has recently followed training might over-report the provision of training opportunities at his or her organization. This type of bias is dealt with by comparing the results with the results of the qualitative part of this study.

A second response bias is the social desirability bias. In order to reduce this bias, participants' complete anonymity was ensured (Goodwin, 2005) and mixed methods were used to see if these methods provide converging results. Concerning

job performance, a meta-perspective was used, leading to more reliable and valid results in previous studies (Schoorman & Mayer, 2008). Regarding the quality of HR practices it was emphasized in the beginning of the survey that there were no good or wrong answers and that the researcher intended to measure the *perception* of the employees.

A third response bias is called response acquiescence: the tendency to agree with statements (Goodwin, 2005). To avoid this, statements of the organizational commitment scale the survey (see appendix 2, the items with a “R” are reversely scored) were formulated both in a favorable and unfavorable manner and reverse coding was used. This forces respondents to read each item carefully and make item-by-item decisions (Goodwin, 2005). It is therefore expected that this type of response bias will not distort the results.

Another bias is the non-response bias. In the present study a low response rate was obtained, which can be explained by the length of the survey (Aaker et al., 1998; Smith, Olah, Hansen & Cumbo, 2003) and the characteristics of the sample since the profile of the typical non-responder is an older, unmarried male with a low educational level (Mangione, 1998) and the participants of the present study are at least 45 years old, mainly male and have a relatively low educational level. Also, no incentive was given to fill out the survey. On the other hand, some participants might have an intrinsic interest in the topic, the credibility of the sponsoring organization is fairly high and the survey was printed on a paper with the logo of this organization and two follow-up letters were sent. Although it has been argued response rates are linked to representativeness of a survey sample and overall data quality, research suggests that response rates are a poor measure of non-response bias and data quality (Curtin, Presser & Singer, 2000; Merkle & Edelman, 2002; Montaquila et al, 2007). A meta-analysis that examined response rates and non-response bias in 59 surveys found no clear association between non-response rates and non-response bias (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008).

A last issue is self-selection, since the employees who returned the survey might differ in some important aspects from those who did not return it (Saunders et al, 2009). It might be that they have a more negative perception of the quality of HR practices, being skeptical about having an influence on the policy their organizations offer or it might be that they are more positive and that they do not see the need of filling out the survey. Unfortunately, it was impossible to check whether non-

respondents differed in a particular way from responders based on the information FNV-KIEM provided me.

Chapter 5: Findings Qualitative Study

This chapter gives the main results of the qualitative study of this thesis. The data are presented around the five research issues, so there are five sections and a last section that compares the findings of interviewees with “high occupational status” with the findings of the group of interviewees with a “low occupational status”. The focus is on the identified patterns in the data. However, details in the form of quotations will also be presented in this chapter to illustrate the analysis.

The rich and detailed information obtained during the in-depth interviews are summarized and explained without losing sight of the wealth of information by the use of supporting quotations. Frequency counting has been used, assuming that the words that are mentioned most often reflect the greatest concerns. I checked for synonyms not to underestimate the importance of a concept (Weber, 1990) and I am aware that words have multiple meanings. Also, I am aware of the fact that each word might not represent a category equally well and that not all issues are equally difficult to raise (Weber, 1990).

This chapter is structured by research issue and subthemes identified in the data. It was chosen to structure this chapter by research issue, since it was thought to help the reader to follow the thesis more easily. Structuring it by research issues would make sense and would be coherent, because the literature review in chapter three as well as the discussion and conclusion in chapter seven are structured the same way. It was therefore considered more appropriate than for example starting with the issues that are most mentioned and going through all the issues this way. Each subtheme is summarized and quotations are provided to support the explanations provided. This includes the research issues as well as new themes that emerged during the interviews. The five research issues were:

- 1.) How do older employees experience the world of work today*
- 2.) How do older employees perceive HR practices in their organization?*
- 3.) How do older employees describe their commitment toward their organization and their occupation?*
- 4.) How do older employees describe their job performance?*
- 5.) Which factors influence their retirement decisions?*

To give a brief overview of all the data, one matrix with all themes and subthemes is provided right at the beginning of this chapter. The themes related to the HR practices are factors that were intended to be explored in the interviews. However, all the other themes and all the subthemes presented below emerged from the interviews. One can look at this matrix to get an overall idea about the results.

This chapter begins by giving an overview of what it means to be an older employee in the creative industry in the Netherlands. Then, the way interviewees perceived the HR practices offered by their organizations are discussed, with a focus on the HR practices under study: flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation and recognition and respect. However, other issues that emerged, like the ambiance of work or the increasing workload are also discussed. Furthermore, the issue of commitment will be discussed. Then, an overview on the retirement decision will be provided. When do older employees want to retire? When do they think they can realistically retire? Which factors play a role in their retirement decision? Under which circumstances would the older employees in this study be willing to prolong their working lives? These questions will be answered and explained by the use of quotes from interviewees. Factors influencing their performance at work will be outlined briefly as well and age discrimination among older employees in the creative industry in the Netherlands is discussed. The chapter ends with a comparison with the interviewees with an occupational rank of 1 or 2 versus interviewees with an occupational rank of 3 or 4 and the significance of the differences is discussed.

Table 5.1: Overview main themes identified in the qualitative study.

Theme	Subthemes
RESEARCH ISSUE 1	
Being an older employee	Older employees are too expensive Organizational roles of older employees Tacit knowledge and knowledge sharing Fear of not being able to keep up with the current developments Declining ambition Having to prove oneself Resignation
Perception of changes in the industry	Hectic working environment Declining creativity in the creative industry Increasing workload Ambiance at work Working over-hours
Perceived age discrimination	Hiring procedures Age discrimination at the workplace Positive age discrimination

Stereotypes of older employees
Theory-reality paradox

RESEARCH ISSUE 2

Perceived HR practices

Flexible work options

Job design

Training

Evaluation of performance

Terms and conditions of employment

Recognition and respect

The existence/absence of a special policy for older employees
(Dis)satisfaction with HR practices
Shifts
Flexible working hours
Working from home
Working part-time
Job transfer
Internal job change
Challenging assignment/special projects
Ergonomic adaptations
Training opportunities
Equal opportunities regarding training for older and younger employees
Focus of the training
Promotion
Performance appraisal
Feedback
Salary
Secondary terms of employment
Importance of recognition and respect
Recognition for knowledge and experience of older employee

RESEARCH ISSUE 3

Commitment

Commitment towards the occupation
Emotional commitment towards the organization
Continuance committed
Change in commitment
Factors influencing organizational commitment

RESEARCH ISSUE 4

Job performance

RESEARCH ISSUE 5

Retirement age

Financial considerations

Health

Psychological factors

Personal development factors

Social factors

Pleasure/joy

Organizational factors

Factors influencing the retirement decision
Desire to keep a certain standard of living
Necessity

Being used to the idea to retire at a certain age
Contribution made
Sense of accomplishment
Having something to do
Staying sharp and up-to-date
Be part of society and meaningful job

Contact with colleagues and clients
Partners
Good ambiance
Enjoys current situation
Recognition and respect
Jobs with fewer responsibilities
Voluntary character of retirement decision
Flexibility
Doing something completely different
Desire for a focus on experience instead of age
Communication
Growth possibilities

5.1 Research issue 1

The first theme is 'being an older employee', related to the first research issue: how is it to be an older employee nowadays? This research issue aimed to get an overall idea of what it is like to be an older employee and what issues are involved. An overview of what it means to be an older employee in the creative industry in the Netherlands will be given. The interviewees' feelings, fears, reflections and wishes regarding how it is to be an older employee at the workplace nowadays are explained and regrouped in several subthemes. The first issue deals with the impression held by the interviewees themselves that they are 'too expensive'. The second subtheme is about the different organizational roles older employees can or wish to occupy as well as their wish to share their knowledge. Their fears are outlined as well as their declining ambition, the impression they have to prove themselves to contradict stereotypes and their changing attitude. The subthemes briefly outlined above are now explained in more detail below.

5.1.1 Older employees are too expensive

One subtheme identified in this research concerns the idea that older employees are too expensive. In the Netherlands, salary increases automatically when one ages in all occupations or jobs, so older employees are more expensive than younger ones, which negatively affects the employability of older employees. Furthermore, this study found that about half of the interviewees have the impression that organizations stop investing in older employees, because they think that investing in younger employees will give a higher return on investment, although they might be more likely to leave the organization than an older employee. Interviewee 5 works fulltime as a freelancer for an organization and comments on the mentality in the graphical industry.

Female, 49 years (interviewee 5): The mentality has to change. They (the employers) think that an employee becomes too expensive when one ages. The graphical sector is commercial you know, it's all, uh, about money. If I sack an older employee I can hire a younger employee for half the money, why wouldn't I do that? That's the mentality.

Interviewee 2 is currently working fulltime, but has been severely ill during several months.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): I've been ill and when I came back they quickly wanted to put me somewhere else. They suggested to go and look for a job elsewhere, at a different organization. I had the impression that they wanted to get rid of me, because of the money. Of course. Some openly acknowledged it, others turned around the real problem and gave crappy arguments to make me leave.

Interviewee 16 has worked in the graphical sector till 2004, he has been unemployed for 2.5 years and did not manage to find another job in this sector. He is now working fulltime in a school as a teacher. He explains that they do not need older employees anymore, and age starts being an issue at the age of 45. He explains that he was 48 when he got unemployed and states that the trade union for this sector, FNV-KIEM, has done nothing to help.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 16): Instead offering training to young people, they should offer training to those employees who have the capacities. Not with the idea, he'll be gone in five years time anyway. Because, well, that's how they think. You can invest in young employees, but there is a chance that they'll leave. You see, the old one, he'll stay. That's another way to look at it, but well, that's not the way they see it.

5.1.2 Organizational roles of older employees

The next subtheme concerns the roles of older employees at the organization. Here, 26% of the interviewees explained the role of continuous training and development opportunities in order to be able to occupy different social roles like becoming a mentor or manager. Although not very common, the older employees in this research seemed to appreciate other social roles within their organization. Managerial functions and mentoring roles to transfer knowledge and skills to younger colleagues are frequently mentioned as something they desired. However, the interviewees in this study do hardly get offered these opportunities.

Female, 49 years (interviewee 5): One can put older employees in managerial functions so that they can facilitate and assist others. And then also give them (older employees) the training to get such positions, to give them the chance. That employees can develop themselves throughout the years, so they will be able to have higher, managerial functions at some stage. To keep employees up-to-date an

organization has to offer training opportunities right from the start and keep on providing training throughout their career, unless employees do not wish to follow training of course. Like that, they will become vital for organizations. Older employees have more experience and knowledge, but are less up-to-date. If older employees keep on developing themselves by following training they can stay up-to-date and have the whole package of experience, knowledge and up-to-date skills. This type of employee is highly valued by organizations and is perfect to accompany or manage others.

5.1.3 Tacit knowledge and knowledge sharing

The concept of tacit knowledge and knowledge sharing is important to the interviewees in this study. It seems that it is widely recognized that older employees possess valuable tacit knowledge and interviewees who do feel that their experience and knowledge is valued do appreciate this. Going a step further, 7 interviewees have expressed the wish to share or transfer their knowledge to younger employees who are just entering the workplace. They state that they can really add some value to the organization by doing so, but only few organizations give older employees such opportunities.

Interviewee 25 is currently recovering from an important lung surgery. He is working fulltime and he has restarted working on the basis of reintegration.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): My generation is very important to society. You hear it all the time, but organizations do not seem to use older employees. It is often like, to say it, well, there is the old chap again, you know. And I think that's really sad, I mean, we have quite a bit of knowledge, but you know, we've come at a certain age where you can't give your 100% anymore. In my case anyway. But you can still mean a lot for the younger generations by accompanying and training them. Transfer of knowledge to younger generations. In my case ... I'd like to do a combination of working in the production and working in an office, which is more quiet. I'd like to transfer the knowledge I've gained over the years to colleagues and other departments within the organization. To help the organization to improve things.

Interviewee 16 would like to see that organizations start using the knowledge and experience of older employees. He explains that organizations think that they do not need the knowledge of older employees anymore, because all this work is now done

by machines, but that if there is a problem one day, only older employees know how to solve it, because they are the only ones who know how to do all this work by hand. He would also like to see that older employees are used as mentors, like it was in the past, but that all this has changed nowadays and that it hardly exists.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 16): With the ever-changing technology you're constantly adapting. At least in the graphical sector. They think that the skills of older employees are superfluous.

Interviewee 12 works fulltime in the roll depart and states that he respects the knowledge and experience of colleagues that work even longer for the organization. He explains that he trusts them and that he has last learnt a lot from them.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 12): Colleagues of mine that have been working for more years than me, well, you trust them. The knowledge you know, I've learned a lot from them. Now I'm working with younger colleagues and they come to me. It works perfectly well. I think you have to work together. Use the experience and knowledge of older employees to teach younger employees and the other way round.

Interviewee 13 works fulltime and explains that the organization relies on internal knowledge to train other employees.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): The experience, knowledge and skills of older employees get recognized absolutely. There is no education to learn how to work at our department, it's all internal knowledge and experience. The organization is very careful, because they know they can't get the knowledge elsewhere, so you feel the recognition.

5.1.4 Fear of not being able to keep up with the current developments

Being an older employee nowadays also brings some fears. The creative industry is changing rapidly with more and more technological innovations that have changed the nature of the job. Two interviewees fear these developments and wonder if they are able to keep up with the changes. Three interviewees have left the creative industry because they could not follow the technological developments, while six interviewees simply stress how important it is to stay informed. Interviewee 11 feels

unsure about his own capacities to keep up with the new developments.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 12): When you're getting towards the age of sixty you start wondering, can I get along? It's a question mark. How far can I go with all those modern machines, those new techniques? I'm wondering sometimes if I'll manage.

Interviewee 14 is working fulltime from home being self-employed. It has been a choice to start his own business after having worked for years as an employee.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 14): Things are changing fast. You just have to make sure that you stay enthusiastic and up-to-date regarding the technological developments.

5.1.5 Declining ambition

Three older employees in the present study state that they are less ambitious now than they were in the past. The interviewees explained that they have followed some courses in the past in order to get higher positions but that they are now happy where they are and that they do not want to advance their career anymore, they even prefer to do a step back. Similarly, one interviewee state that although she first loved to travel to lots of places for her job, she now prefers to stay at home and only follow the minimum amount of training necessary to continue to exercise her job properly. Interviewee 17 is a fulltime printer and explains that he wanted to make career when he was younger, that he wanted to climb up the ladder, was more ambitious. But this has changed over the years and he now thinks that he is good where he is.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): In the past I've followed quite a few courses and training sessions to get higher up. It's clear that I was more ambitious then I am at the moment. You see, now I'm like, I keep up-to-date when really necessary and for the rest, well, I don't want more.

Interviewee 27 is a fulltime manager and spends most of his time managing people.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 27): I've been a manager for five or seven years and I actually don't want to do it anymore. I'd like to help people at the workfloor, you know, to improve some things, but not like I did in the past.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): In the past I was more ambitious than I am now. If it's not absolutely necessary I don't want to follow extra courses. I've had enough. I am happy at the level where I am working at the moment, I would like to continue like this for another few years.

Interviewee 9 is surprised to see how her wishes and needs have changed with age. She was a fashion designer before and had to go shopping in London and Paris. But now she feels that she does not want to be away all the time anymore. She does not need to prove herself anymore, to have constant stimulation, to take all the possibilities there are. She is happy with who she is and what she can.

5.1.6 Having to prove oneself

Five interviewees stated that there are several stereotypes regarding older employees and that they feel they have to prove that they are incorrect. The interviewees mentioned that organizations assume that younger employees learn new skills more easily, are better with computers or are faster than older employees. Interviewee 8 is since a year in the health law after a two-week trial period. Before that she has been unemployed.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 8): Organizations are more focused on younger employees. You see that because they assume that youngsters learn things more easily, especially regarding computers. They think that older employees are behind in these kind of things. So you have to prove yourself being an older employee. They think you can not keep up with the newest developments. They think that older employees might have experience, the younger employees are the ones who come up with ideas. They expect more from younger employees.

5.1.7 Resignation

The attitude at the organization of older employees changes with age. Two older employees described themselves as being less excited and state that in situations where younger employees get upset, older employees stay calm. One interviewee

said that because older employees are often more relaxed, this does not mean that they are not enthusiastic, they simply experience for instance the arrival of a new machine in a different way. In other words, older employees experience an attitude change. Interviewee 27 explains that while he first got upset when things went wrong at the organization, he now feels a certain distance.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 27): Resignation, you see, when a machine stops working because of a lack of maintenance, then I say, well, do your thing. A young person might hit his nose six times, an older person does not do that.

5.1.8 Perception of changes in the industry

The creative industry is changing and these changes are perceived in a certain way by older employees. 13 interviewees perceived these changes in a negative way and cited workload increases, increases in hecticism in the industry, degrading ambience and working over-hours as common practice.

5.1.9 Hectic working environment

Seven interviewees mentioned that their job is getting more and more hectic, especially regarding deadlines and technological developments. This leads in some cases to the fear of not being able to keep up with the pace and incited some interviewees to leave the industry or start their own business.

Interviewee 19 has started his career as hand typesetter, then followed courses to become a printer and finally became a graphical designer. He started working at age 16 and is currently working fulltime. He states it is a constant process of staying up-to-date with new technology in the sense of machines and computers.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 19): Nowadays you get the information from internet, everything is done by mail and in pdf-format, it's all going faster and faster, but as a result it's also more hectic. I mean, the deadlines have become tighter, the perspective has changed and we can feel it.

5.1.10 Declining creativity in the creative industry

Creativity has been mentioned by four interviewees as a reason to choose to work in the creative industry. However, the creative aspect of these occupations seems to be declining. Three interviewees feel less and less engaged with the creative industry

as a result of the technological developments and the new techniques and ways of working this has brought to the workplace. Three interviewees stated that their job has become increasingly dominated by machines and that they feel less challenged by it. Interviewee 30 works fulltime at a small printing firm and also has a small own business as a designer. He states that as he is originally a designer, he would have liked to be able to be more creative. He explains that he does not design anymore, while this was the case in the past. He also states that he gets much work directly from clients and that his most important task is to correct their work instead of making something new, being creative. He states that this has changed in the last 15 years since almost everyone has a computer and is able to design whatever they want. He states that he actually does not really exercise his profession anymore. He explains that he is often put at other departments to work, because there is simply not enough work at his own department.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): I'm originally a graphical designer and I like the creative aspect of my occupation. But in the organisation they removed more and more the creative aspects, it's only about correcting mistakes of work that clients give us instead creating something new. It's the trend, it's not graphical anymore, it's more technical.

Interviewee 26 is currently working fulltime in the graphical sector but states that he is now looking what his qualities are and what he would like to do. So he states that as soon as he knows better what he wants, that he will leave the graphical sector and make a career change.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 26): I'm tired of the graphical sector. I'm currently looking at my possibilities, my competencies to see if I can leave the graphical sector. I've always been very involved with the graphical sector I also liked my profession, but the current developments, the automatization, are such that I don't see any challenge anymore. I like it less. If I'll get the chance, I'll leave the graphical sector.

5.1.11 Increasing workload

Two older employees stated that their job is getting more and more stressful, that the time pressure and the workload increase while they would like to decrease the

workload with age. This also seems to be a factor that enhances the chance to escape the present situation by either changing organization, occupation or withdraw completely from the workplace by retiring early.

Male, 50 years (interviewee 10): The workload is increasing, but that's the general tendency and that's impossible to change. You get less time to get orders ready, so in that respect it has become more hectic.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): I'd like to be able to decide myself regarding my working speed. I've discussed it, but they don't do anything with it. They count the heads, so many people here, so many people there. The production has to increase with as few employees as possible.

5.1.12 Ambiance at work

Ambiance at work was an unforeseen popular topic among interviewees in the present study. It seems important and differs greatly from interviewee to interviewee. Six interviewees experienced a positive and informal ambiance where employees help each other and where the boss listens to the employees and allows them much freedom, while five stated that the ambiance at work is degrading, that it is getting increasingly cold and less social, and that it is only about making money. Interviewee 3 has no diplomas or certificates and works fulltime in a small organization with only six employees. He explains that a small organization allows the boss to give more freedom.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 3): The ambiance is very good here. When there is a family problem or so, our boss is so easy. He's the one to tell you to go home instead of an employee having to ask for it. We behave in a very social way here.

Interviewee 6 works full-time as a secretary and comments on the ambiance of her current organization, compared to the organization where she worked before.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): I've worked in an accountants office before and there was a lot of hierarchy. Clients were treated carefully and in a formal, polite way. We said mister and madam. It's a real difference from where I work now. We are polite, but it's very informal and we can feel many young people work here. It's

very open.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): The organization has changed enormously, it's getting colder and colder. In the past, the organization was considered a good place to work, but it's decreasing quickly. Social support, social contacts, is becoming less and less frequent. It's all about business. It's such a shame. And the young ones are dealing with it differently than my generation.

5.1.13 Working over-hours

Working over-hours seems common practice in the creative industry. Fifteen interviewees mentioned that working over-hours is an unwritten rule.

Interviewee 16 explains that he would work more if they need him and that he would receive some form of extra compensation if the organization is doing well. He states that he dislikes that fact that in the graphical sector everyone is working many more hours than the hours that are written down in their contracts: it is seen as normal to work more.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 16): We constantly work more than what's written in our contracts. Like 20 hours more or so, always. And when you say once that you're leaving at five o'clock, they look at you like, where are you going?

5.1.14 Perceived age discrimination

Over half of interviewees in the present study did report that they experienced some age discrimination. Most of them during hiring procedures, but also in more subtle forms, as a result of persistent stereotypes about older employees. It is important to note that age discrimination in the creative industry starts early, namely at age 40-45.

5.1.15 Hiring procedures

Again, over half of interviewees of all ages (but all above 45) have experienced age discrimination, most of them during hiring procedures. The interviewees stated that working more than what is written in your contract is seen as normal and because organizations assume that older employees want a regular schedule, organizations prefer younger employees.

Interviewee 5 is a freelancer outside the creative industry, although she worked previously in this industry. She explains how she never managed to get another job in this industry as result of (according to her) her age.

Female, 49 years (interviewee 5): There are many younger employees in the graphical sector, that's also a reason why I left the graphical sector. When I lost my job, I did not find another job. I think that my age was part of the problem. By that time I was 46 and they're not very keen on hiring someone that age. They might invite you, but you don't get hired, with 12 years of experience. So I had the experience, but I didn't get the chance while in the beginning of my career I didn't have any experience but I got invited several times and also got hired. The graphical sector is really for young people. They expect from people to work over-hours, you can't have a 9 to 5 mentality.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): I've sent a few letters of application, but I didn't get invited. I've the impression that it was because of my age.

Male, 50 years (interviewee 10): I've been looking for another job, but clearly, your age starts being an obstacle. When you're 50 and you're applying for a job, they don't say it directly, but they consider you too old.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): I'm a printer doing day-shifts. With this profile I won't find another job, there are few offers and when I applied for a job I got the impression from their reply that they think I'm too old.

5.1.16 Age discrimination at the workplace

In this study, 50% of the interviewees mentioned that organizations do not take their experience into account and only see the fact that they are more expensive than a younger colleague. The interviewees said they feel excluded from society, because they struggled to find a new job after the age of 45. It was mentioned that their younger colleagues did not take them seriously, because they assumed their skills would be outdated. Three older employees think it is normal that their organization tries to attract younger employees, because they will be the ones that will make the organization survive when older employees retire.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 8): I've worked in a team with very young colleagues and in the beginning they did not take me seriously because I didn't have the same background and I had to manage them. However, after a few weeks they started accepting me.

Interviewee 11 is unemployed after having worked for 11 years at his previous organization that went bankrupt. He states that the first ten years were good, but that the last year everything changed and degraded. The organization has forced him to change department and work in a function that he has never done before with the aim to make him leave.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 11): I've worked there for 11 years, of which 10 years with satisfaction. However, my last year was a nightmare. They kicked me out of my department, they gave me another function, they harassed me until I left. The company wasn't doing well and they kicked out all the older employees, because they are most expensive you see. I am unemployed and being at home whole day is making me depressed. When I see all the other people leaving in the morning to go to work... I've had a real bad time. I'm doing better now, I'm getting over it, but it's still hard. I now fall under the unemployment act, but soon I'll get the social security scheme. And you know, I haven't worked for 42 years to get the social security scheme. You're an outsider, you don't belong to society anymore. You can apply for jobs as much as you want, but they won't hire you. I don't even get invited and the chance that I'll find a job is pretty small I'm afraid.

5.1.17 Positive age discrimination

Three interviewees state that they experienced positive age discrimination, because some organizations recognize the importance of the knowledge and experience of older employees.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): We've hired some older employees lately, because age doesn't matter, it's all about someone's background. Nowadays we hire more younger employees, because they are cheaper, that's normal. But at the same time we take people over 50 because of their professional expertise.

5.1.18 Stereotypes of older employees

The interviewees recognized the existence of some stereotypes. One of them is that older employees would not be interested in training anymore. They state that only younger employees can climb up and that they therefore feel neglected and dislike that they stay where they are whilst younger colleagues climb up, get a higher salaries and start being bossy towards older employees who have much more experience, but who did not get the chance to get higher up. Interviewee 22 explains that he has experienced age discrimination when he was looking for a job during his unemployment.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 22): They hinted that they thought I wouldn't be as alert, that I couldn't follow the current trends, that type of stuff. It makes you a bit depressed, powerless also, because you can't change your age. It's unfair, but well, for the price of one 40-year old they can hire three people in their twenties. Instead of looking at their experience... that comes only on the second or third place. Well, it's changing now, but finances are still their main consideration.

Another interviewee has experienced age discrimination in the decision which employees would get offered training.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): Training was designed for younger employees. Older employees were seen as second-class employees. Young employees are fresh. They generalize that older people aren't interested in training anymore, so they don't even offer it. And then the younger employees get promoted, get better positions and they manage the older employees that did not get the chance to get higher up.

5.1.19 Theory-reality paradox

Five interviewees in the present study explain the paradox of a government that wants employees to keep on working until higher ages, while older employees have problems finding a new job when they lose their job. They explain that there is a big gap between theory and practice and that in the creative industry employees from the age of 45 onwards have problems finding another job. The interviewees explain that they think that older employees are simply too expensive compared to younger employees and that the pay system should change into a system where pay is no longer linked to a certain age, but to skills, experience and capacities.

Male, 50 years (interviewee 10): They (the government) are always talking about working longer and longer, but it's kind of double. One the one hand they say that you have to stay longer in the workforce, but when you lose your job at 45 you won't find a new job because you're too old you see. They don't say it, but that's how it is in practice.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 16): The government says that people have to work longer, but they're stupid in my eyes. They don't have a clue what's going on at the work floor. You see, people aged 50, well, they have already trouble finding a job. From age 55 onwards the organization starts giving cold stares to make them leave and then they have to work till the age of 67! It's all theory.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): Although the government says that older employees are more employable, I've the impression that it doesn't happen anyway. Older employees are left to fend their own devices. First of all because they're too expensive, of course. I think that when an organization can hire a young person that has just finished school or an older employee with experience, that they prefer the younger one. Imagine that I would become unemployed. Whatever job I want, taxi driver, builder, accepting to earn a few hundred euros less, I'd still be too expensive. Although the government screams that older employees are working and have to keep on working till older and older ages, it just does not happen. The solution would be that you don't earn more automatically when you get older. That it's more linked to knowledge and experience.

5.2 Research issue 2

The second research issue identified in chapter two was: what is the perception of older employees about the HR practices at their organization?

Almost all interviewees stated that there is no special policy for older employees or that it is limited or unclear. One interviewee said there were special HR practices for older employees. Three interviewees were self-employed and were satisfied with their working arrangement. Although they do not get offered HR practices, they did enjoy certain characteristics like the possibility to work from home, to decide themselves on their working hours and to get direct recognition from their clients for example.

5.2.1 The existence/absence of a special policy for older employees

Almost all interviewees stated that to their knowledge there is no special policy for older employees in their organization. They simply get offered the same facilities and possibilities as any other employee and one has the same job from the beginning of their working life until retirement. Three said that they do not know if there is a special policy for older employees or not. Only one interviewee mentioned that there is a special policy for older employees in order to give equal chances to employees of all ages. However, two older employees think this will change in the near future to retain skilled older employees, so they are fairly optimistic that age-related practices will develop.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): There is no policy. I just go along with the rest of the group. I do the same as all the others, so no adaptations because of my age or something.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): The only difference I see compared to the other employees is that we (older employees) have one or two extra days off a year. Otherwise there is no policy designed for older employees.

5.2.2 (Dis)satisfaction with HR practices

Eleven interviewees were dissatisfied with the current HR practices offered at their organization. Especially working shifts was seen as something hard to deal with. All of them wished to stop working shifts since this is physically tiring. Seven interviewees explained that they are happy that there is no such thing as a special policy for older employees, because this would make them feel 'old'. They thus prefer to get offered the same facilities as any other employee. The self-employed interviewees enjoyed their freedom and were satisfied with the characteristics of this type of work-arrangement.

Interviewee 16 is nowadays a teacher, but worked previously as a printer in a monastery.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 16): We worked in a monastery printer before, so there was everyone organized. Then there was a reorganization and a commercial person got in charge who really made a mess of it all. Everyone who worked there for 30-40 years were treated like pigs.

Interviewee 28 is unemployed after his organization went bankrupt two weeks before the interview took place, he has always worked fulltime. He explains that at a certain stage too many older employees retired and that the organization got in trouble as a result. The organization then asked some of them to work a little longer in order to provide younger employees with a decent training internally. He also states that the educational level became too low, that there were too little skilled employees and that people with many skills and certificates had left the organization themselves to find another job. He tells that the organization hired mostly younger employees because they were cheaper, but they had to change this and hire some expensive older employees to keep enough knowledge within the organization.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): At a certain moment they noticed that the educational level was too low. They never offered any training, either internal or external, so all people with a good educational level left the organization to go and work elsewhere.

Interviewee 6 explains that the average age of the company where she has been working for for the last two years is between the age of 30 and 40 and although she is 53, she feels she gets exactly the same treatment as the other employees, which she enjoys. She gives as example that if all employees go and do some sports together, they always ask her if she wants to come as well. They do not have the idea that because she has passed the age of 50 she should stay home.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): At the moment I am actually happy that there are no special facilities, because I think I would feel so old if that would be the case. I arrived here two years ago and the average is between 30 and 40, so I'm quite a bit older. But they treat me the same way. There is no distinction and I have to say that I actually enjoy it.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 14): I'm self-employed so I work from home. It's a choice. I've been an employee for years, but I spent more time managing others than truly exercising my job, so I decided to start for myself. I enjoy it. The advantages are that you can take your own decisions, it gives me a relative feeling of freedom, you don't have to discuss things with others and you can decide on your own

network, so your own colleagues. In the past I spent whole days at the office, now I'm working from home and I'm more involved with family life and that's positive.

5.2.3 Flexible work options

Flexibility seems to be very important for the older employees in this study and was mentioned by twenty-six interviewees. Those who experience flexibility enjoy it and those who do not have it express the wish for more flexible work options. However, six interviewees did recognize that their organization often can not offer flexible work options as a result of the nature of their tasks or size of the organization. Several flexible work options will be discussed in more detail below: shifts, flexible working hours, working from home and working part time.

5.2.4 Shifts

Twelve interviewees worked shifts and strongly disliked it. They stated that working shifts is getting harder and harder as they age and mentioned that it would be reasonable that employees above a certain age do not need to work shifts anymore.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): Regarding flexible work options there are few possibilities. We work in two shifts and it's impossible to change that you see.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): In general I'm quite satisfied with the policy, the only thing I dislike is that we have to work shifts. They just obliged me to do it, so I'm a bit unhappy with that. In the past I've worked a lot in shifts and I decided to stop it, because I found it very hard. But since it's difficult to find another job nowadays, I just have to accept it. So that's what I do for the moment.

5.2.5 Flexible working hours

Regarding flexible working hours three older employees in this research stated that they can work whenever they want as long as they make their hours. Flexible working hours is also a practice that older employees would like to see at their organization, since they consider it especially suitable to older employees. Interviewee 6 states that it would be possible if she wishes to change working hours.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): I can discuss it if I would like to work other hours. If it suits me better to start and finish half an hour earlier, then that's no problem.

For example, I don't work on Thursdays but if I want to change that to the Friday for once, then I can change that, so that's quite flexible.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): We are supposed to be present, but if there's little work we can go home if we want to. It is a really flexible organization. On the other hand, if it's very busy they expect us to give more than 100%. But it works like that, everyone does give him or herself for more than 100% if needed.

Female, 51 (interviewee 9): Working hours could be a bit more flexible when you age. I think that would be quite handy. When you're a little older, that you can decide yourself when you start. See, you do make your hours, you won't try to do the minimum.

5.2.6 Working from home

Three older employees could work from home, but six interviewees explained that they do production work that does not lend itself to be done at home. Two interviewees could work from home, but prefer to go to work for social aspects. Two interviewees mentioned their bosses had a negative attitude towards working from home.

Interviewee 3 works in a very flexible organization, but prefers not to work from home because working at the office allows him to interact with his colleagues.

Interviewee 10 is working in the printing industry and explains that working from home is impossible, because the job does not lend itself to work at home.

Male, 50 years (interviewee 10): Working from home would never be possible, since I am working in the production.

Interviewee 18 is currently working part time at an institution for youth with problems. He is working in the department where clients in crisis arrive and where they manage the various waiting lists in order to find a suitable place as soon as possible. He worked previously in the graphical sector.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): I've understood that the organization isn't very willing to allow employees to work from home. It's a shame, because quite a few tasks would be fine to do from home. You see, the department where I work is very

busy and it's sometimes quite difficult to concentrate.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): It is impossible to work from home. My boss doesn't want it.

5.2.7 Working part time

Only a few interviewees work part time, because they have chosen to do so, not because of other commitments. These interviewees, especially women, enjoy their free time. They state that because they have time to exercise their hobbies and balance their different needs and wishes in their lives, they might want to retire at a later age.

Male, 53 years, (interviewee 18): I work 28 hours a week, one week three days the other week four days. I can change my working hours with colleagues and I've never asked for other possible flexible work options.

Interviewee 23 is a graphical designer, but he explains that he is not working anymore in the creative industry and that he is now teaching at a school. He states that working conditions are better there. He explains older workers can start working less hours, while still getting the same salary, which he thinks is a big advantage compared to the creative industry.

Male, 58 years (interviewee 23): I have a contract for 18 hours, so that's already an advantage because then you have some time left. Another advantage is that I can put those hours on four days, so there is one day where I can do what I want and I like that.

5.2.8 Job design

The second HR practice under study is job design. I focused on job transfers, internal job changes and the provision of challenging projects and assignments. Ergonomic adjustments to work in terms of equipment were an aspect of the job that also concerns older employees and which organizations have started to take into account.

5.2.9 Job transfer

Six older employees have had the opportunity to redeploy less strenuous jobs or have

been provided with tools to make the job less hard to execute and report that they really appreciated it. However, this option does not appear to be widely available. Interviewee 1 works fulltime as a printer and has obtained a whole range of certificates after high school which allowed him to get quite a good level of education. He explained that last year the organization has received a new printer. The organization wanted him to work on this new machine, but he has asked the organization to stay with his smaller machine, since the new machine would make the work physically harder.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): We have a new four-colour printer since last year and I was supposed to work with this new machine, that's bigger and harder to work with. So I went to see my manager and asked him if I couldn't stay with my current, smaller machine. Because this new machine is physically a bit harder. So I explained that I'm getting older and it's already getting harder anyway. They agreed.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): They (the organization) try to reduce physically hard work. They are really working on it. They have electric trailers to lift stuff. But they won't create other positions for older employees to make their job physically less demanding. Everything is structured, the chance to get promoted and get another job is small, it's only possible when someone leaves and that doesn't happen very often.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): The organization tries to find another, more suitable and less stressful job for people who have had a burnout, something that happens quite a lot in the child welfare. The organization often tries to make them restart in an administrative job.

5.2.10 Internal job change

Internal job changes are quite common when an older employee expresses the need to go to a less strenuous job. The interviewees explain that they can go to a job with fewer responsibilities sometimes or that they get training in order to go to a completely different department. Internal job change does not differ from job transfer if it takes place within the organization. However, small organizations do not offer those opportunities, because it is simply not possible.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): If I'm still working in few years time and I think, well, it's all a bit too much, I guess it's possible to go give some of my responsibilities to someone else and continue working a little less and a little slower. So that bit by bit, someone else, someone younger, is taking over, you see, and I gradually get more responsibilities removed.

Interviewee 7 does not work in the creative industry anymore for the past three years. She now works fulltime for a health insurance, which she enjoys. She has made an internal career switch within the organization and states that if you do not like your current position anymore, they offer you training to become something completely different. She expresses great satisfaction with this policy. She feels that she is constantly developing herself and that the organization stimulates her to do so, which motivates her.

Female, 48 years (interviewee 7): You get enough support regarding your job or tasks. If you feel it's getting too heavy and you can't deal with it anymore, they'll look for training and later on they will see if they can get you another function within the organization where you can fully exploit your capacities.

Male, 56 years (interviewee 20): It's impossible to go to another position within the organization. The organization is simply too small to provide such opportunities.

5.2.11 Challenging assignments/special projects

Three interviewees have had many special projects, like having a job with many different tasks, projects that oblige them to travel and discover new places or work on assignments with employees from different departments or specializations. However, twenty-five interviewees stated they have never been offered any.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): It's production, it's no assembly line, it's not that bad, but I can't say there are many challenging projects. No, that's not the case.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): I get many special tasks and projects. I had a function that allowed me to work on several machines, mentor and manage people, so there is a lot of variety in my job.

5.2.12 Ergonomic adaptations

Four older employees stated that the organization has adapted all chairs and tables to make them ergonomically correct and other interviewees stated that when their organization finds out that many employees are stressed, they start offering sport facilities. These adaptations seem to become increasingly common and are well-appreciated by the interviewees.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 19): The chairs are adapted, the tables are at a certain height that fits the person, they even hired a woman that checked your position behind the computer and adapted everything accordingly. So they really try to create a healthy working environment.

5.2.13 Training

Training is another important HR practice. The interviewees in the present study have a wide range of experiences regarding training possibilities. Training opportunities, equal opportunities, aim of training, and promotion will be explored.

5.2.14 Training opportunities

Twenty-one interviewees stated that there are training possibilities and that one can follow training sessions as long as they are relevant to their current job. Thirteen interviewees mentioned that although the organization does offer training, the initiative to take the training has to come from the employees themselves. Another point is that some organizations only provide internal training.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 3): There are little training opportunities, but my boss is happy to allow people to follow training. However, the initiative has to come from the people themselves.

Interviewee 13 states that the employee has to take initiative, unless there are new machines when all employees need to follow training to obtain the new skills and knowledge needed to work with them.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): They are very flexible when you want to follow something that's related to your job, but even if you want to follow a course that isn't linked to your work at all, they have a positive attitude towards it and help you

finance it.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): I'm working here for 2.5 years now and they never offered me any training. Our department asked for an Excel-training, which we organized ourselves and was financed by the organization.

5.2.15 Equal opportunities regarding training for older and younger employees

Half of the interviewees stated that training is mostly offered to younger employees, because according to the interviewees the organization assumes that the return on investment is highest for younger employees. Four older employees mentioned that they can follow any training they are interested in, even if it has no link with their actual job in order to keep them motivated and that the organization does not make the distinction between older and younger employees. Interviewee 4 perceives there are enough training possibilities. An employee has to submit a request form if he or she wants to follow training, but till now all her requests for training have been accepted.

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): I have the impression that they offer the same opportunities to both older and younger employees.

Interviewee 8 worked for an advertisement office where she felt that the organization had higher expectations from younger employees than from older ones.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 8): They offer more training opportunities to younger people than that they are going to invest in an older employee. Well, that's my experience. They don't think that you still have possibilities to grow, to develop. They think that your skills and knowledge are static. They don't take the wish to develop seriously.

Female, 53 (interviewee 8): Personally I would have liked to see that there are equal possibilities for everyone, regardless age. I'd like to see that there are possibilities to grow, to go to another department, to study... That the organization takes you seriously, older people. I think it's very important that they get possibilities to continue to develop themselves.

Interviewee 13 states that the organization does not differentiate between older and younger employees regarding the possibility to follow training, but he states that older employees in general start less easily something new.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): I think that older employees are more reluctant to start something new. Most of them have been at the organization for at least fifteen years and seem to prefer to stay where they are. They do not seem to be interested in training anymore. Especially during the crisis, when it's important to stay employable, I would expect that people are keener to follow courses, but no, they don't.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): Youngsters have to prove themselves before older employees train them internally. They first have to show that they are willing to work and that they are interested. If not, they won't receive any training.

5.2.16 Focus of the training

One can make a distinction between training to keep skills previously acquired up-to-date and training to obtain new skills or knowledge. The training provided is both meant to up-skill and to keep existing skills up-to-date, depending on the developments in the sector and on the wishes of the employee.

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): The last course I followed was about how to enhance creativity, so that's to learn new skills.

Interviewee 21 states that everything is possible in terms of training as long as one is motivated and happy to arrange it him- or herself. He states that since it is up to the employee to follow training to update their skills, he now sees that some employees have taken the opportunity and are climbing up the ladder quickly and that others express less interest and stay at their current position. He states that older employees are not interested in training, because they already have all certificates.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 21): The organization offers training, but that's only to keep our skills up-to-date.

Interviewee 28 explains that his organization trained everyone internally and that this was also one of his tasks. He states he had external training in the past and he thought it had an added value because they looked at the work in a different way, that this was more enriching. He states it is important for him to have both training internally and externally. That one learns the job internally, but that they learn the fine details externally. He tells that training is both to learn new skills and to keep existing skills and knowledge up-to-date. As an example he states that they are working more and more with plastic and it is completely different to work with this material and training is therefore needed.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): Keeping skills up-to-date is important, but learning new skills as well, especially since the market in the cardboard manufacturing is switching towards plastic, so there is a lot to learn about that.

5.2.17 Promotion

Regarding promotion, thirteen older employees stated their organization does not look at the age of the candidates, fifteen interviewees stated that their organization prefers younger employees because they will stay longer with the organization, while two mentioned that their organization prefers older employees because they have more knowledge and experience.

Interviewee 10 feels that there are equal opportunities for all employees regardless their age and that there are possibilities for those who want it.

Male, 50 years (interviewee 10): They do not look at age regarding promotion opportunities. It's really about skills and ambition.

Interviewee 15 has come to the Netherlands 36 years ago as a refugee. He had finished primary and secondary in England and has obtained some certificates to go to university. However, that moment he had to leave the country. He is now working fulltime in the creative industry.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 15): Getting promoted is quite difficult. There are lots of young people at our organization and they prefer the young ones, because they will stay longer in the workforce than the older people.

Interviewee 28 explains that promotion is mostly at an older age, because people have more know-how when they are older. He states that they train younger employees, but that they first have to prove themselves, that they need to have the mentality that they want to work, that they are enthusiastic and that they can start following training afterwards. He explains that when younger employees do not express an interest, they simply stay where they are and will never make career.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): Older employees are getting promoted more often, because they simply have more know-how.

5.2.18 Evaluation of performance

The evaluation of performance is another HR practice. Here, we can distinguish between performance appraisal and feedback.

5.2.19 Performance appraisal

Twenty-seven interviewees state that their organization uses performance appraisals. However, their perception of this HR practice differs greatly. Ten interviewees stated they can freely express their needs and wishes during the performance appraisal and they have the impression that the organization really listens to them and takes their comments into account, while eight interviewees stated that the performance appraisal is a joke and that they simply have to sign the same paper as the previous year without any form of evaluation or that the organization is doing nothing with what an employee has said during the appraisal. Moreover, age discrimination is felt by a third of the interviewees here, since their wish for training or development is not always taken seriously. In small organizations there are no official performance appraisals, but there is a more informal way of providing constant feedback that replaces this HR tool. Especially in small organizations it seems that feedback is given in a different way.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 3): There are no performance appraisals as a result of the size of the organization. We see each other whole day long, so we're talking anyway. However, once a week we do come together to discuss everything, but it's not structured in a formal way.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 8): They did not take me seriously during those

performance appraisals. They were like, are you really sure you want to study? You're fine where you are, aren't you? Be happy with what you are currently doing. But when you explain that you're truly interested in learning something, they are not keen to invest in you because you're old. They think you're too old to understand the newest developments or that you might get ill at some stage and that you're not worth the investment

Interviewee 25 states that there is a performance appraisal once a year, but he does not have them anymore because he has been absent for quite a while during his illness. However, he states that colleagues tell him different stories about it.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): The personal development conversations are taking place once a year. People have different opinions about it. For some, they really pay attention to you, while others say that they have to re-sign the paper from last year's evaluation with the same aims and goals.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): There is a performance appraisal once a year, that doesn't mean anything. If there are particular wishes, they do not listen to them at all.

5.2.20 Feedback

Two-third of the older employees stated that there is little or no feedback, or that they only receive negative feedback. If older employees received some feedback it is almost always given in an informal way. The interviewees in this study do not have the impression that the negative feedback is related to their age.

Interviewee 5 is a freelancer and thus gets some positive feedback from clients in the sense that they thank her, but she does not have formal performance appraisals.

Female, 49 years (interviewee 5): I only get feedback if something goes wrong or when it's really needed.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 26): My manager is quite pro-active and gives feedback.

Interviewee 28 states his organization was too small to have formal job evaluations and that those things did not happen anyway the last few months. He explains his

organization got bankrupt two weeks before the interview took place and at the end people simply worked, that there was no time for talking anymore. Before, feedback was given in an informal way, during work.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): Feedback is given in a informal way. So things are discussed while working behind the machines during a quiet moment for example. There are no special performance appraisals, it's done directly at the work floor.

5.2.21 Terms and conditions of employment

Terms and conditions of employment includes not only salary, but also secondary terms of employment like extra time off, social security packages or help with childcare. Since the older employees under study work in different sectors, in different positions and functions, their salary and working conditions are diverse.

5.2.22 Salary

Half of the interviewees in the present study were satisfied with the compensation package, while three interviewees thought they did not get enough compared to others. In none of the cases studied is pay linked to their performance, although some organizations have considered this type of compensation.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): In comparison with colleagues working in the same sector I think we're not paid a lot. I think that especially employees with lots of knowledge and experience are paid little.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 21): I've build up my salary over the years and there are the regular increases.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): We have a normal salary that does not depend on your performance

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): There was the idea to compensate people in relation with their performances, but they abandoned it since it's so difficult to measure.

5.2.23 Secondary terms of employment

Regarding secondary terms of employment, all interviewees seemed quite unknowledgeable about their entitlements. They did not know what their organization offers. The only point they mentioned is that they should get a few more days off a year from the age of 51 onwards, which is a common age-related benefit in the Netherlands.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): You get some more days off when you get older. I think it starts at the age of 50, but I'm not sure.

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): In the past you got some extra days off, but now you can also get them financially. So you can choose between some more days off or some extra money. The amount depends on your age and your salary.

5.2.24 Recognition and respect

Recognition and respect are very important to older employees and half of the interviewees do experience a satisfactory level of recognition and respect at their organization. However, eight older employees in this study state that although they know the organization appreciates them, the organization does not express this or they mention the job they perform does not get recognized by the organization or by colleagues.

Interviewee 1 has been working at his organization for twenty-five years and has started with the founder of the organization. In the mean time the organization has been taken over by two sons of the founder of the organization. The two sons often come to talk to interviewee 1 to ask his opinion or ask him to think about decisions that have to be taken.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): There is recognition for what I do. And there is mutual respect, I respect my bosses, but they respect me too. I feel it when they come to see me to discuss things. They respect what I do, they ask me for advice when we discuss the future of the organization. And they really take into account what I say.

Interviewee 15 states that all employees are respected regardless their position or function. He adds that also older employees are respected and gives the example of

an older employee that has worked 36 years at the organization and that his work is still recognized, even after he left the organization.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 15): There is recognition for every employee, regardless of your function or type of job.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 26): The work we do is underestimated. They don't recognize that it can be quite difficult. But as a person we are treated with respect.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): There is recognition, but they do not show it. When something goes wrong, you hear from the organization immediately, but when you're doing well, it's silent. The way I notice that they recognize my work is the bonus at the end of the year or when you have been many years at the organization. But well, the recognition is only shown in the form of a financial bonus.

5.2.25 The importance of recognition and respect

This study found that the older employees emphasized the importance of recognition and respect. Seven interviewees mentioned that they do not like to be treated as a number and that they enjoy that the organization asks them for advice on certain matters

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): It gives you the feeling that you're not a number. That you're taken seriously and that gives some satisfaction I think.

Female, 51 years (interviewee 9): I think you should get some respect being an older employee. I have a managerial function, so then you get some respect anyway. I really appreciate it. I think it's really hard to be very low on the hierarchical ladder when you're in your fifties. They should give some freedom to older employees, some autonomy. An organization shouldn't tell an older employee how to do something.

5.2.26 Recognition for the knowledge and experience of older employees

Six older employees did experience recognition and respect for their skills, knowledge and experience and that they respect the different skills and knowledge of younger employees in return, regardless of the position someone has within the organization. The interviewees stated that they think it is normal that older

employees get respected and that older and younger employees often learn from one another or that older employees provide internal training for younger employees. They also mentioned that the organization often asks them for advice and that they take their opinion truly into account.

Interviewee 17 states that if you are good for your organization, that you then get the recognition and respect you deserve in return. He has the impression that the organization really takes into account his remarks, which he thinks is not only good for him, but also for the organization in the sense that if his advice or comments can make that the process goes faster, it helps to organization to save money.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): The knowledge and experience of older employees is appreciated. They often ask for advice and there are meetings where they ask your opinion. They truly take your advice into account.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): At a certain moment many employees with a lot of experience left the organization because they retired or changed organization. We did feel it. We even asked them to come back to train the younger employees, because we missed the expertise and got in trouble. So their knowledge has definitely been recognized. It's clear that other organizations hire people based on their knowledge, and not because they are cheap. I do see that knowledge is essential and that organizations need it.

5.3 Research issue 3

This study focuses on affective occupational commitment and affective, normative and continuance organizational commitment. Hereunder these types of commitment are explored in more detail by getting the interviewees to talk about how they feel about their occupation and organization. One of the research issues of the study is: how do older employees describe their commitment toward their organization and their occupation?

The older employees in this research have different patterns of organizational and occupational commitment. Some interviewees felt highly engaged with their organization, but experienced no commitment regarding their profession, others had a lot of affinity with the sector they are working in, but did not feel committed to their organization, while other interviewees felt highly committed to both and some were fully disengaged.

5.3.1 Commitment towards the occupation

As mentioned above, the interviewees experienced different levels of occupational and organizational commitment. Almost half of the interviewees did not feel emotionally committed to their occupation, while a little more than half did. In general, self-employed interviewees scored high on occupational commitment while some interviewees have no background in the creative industry and therefore do not experience occupational commitment. The quotations below come from interviewees who are employed by different organizations.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): Many things have changed over the years, but I still love my occupation. If I had to choose again I would probably make the same choice again. The graphical occupation, I think it's a beautiful sector.

Interviewee 3 is working in the graphical sector, but does not have a background in this sector which influences his occupational commitment.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 3): Because I do not have a background in the graphical sector, I do not feel like I am a member of this sector.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): I don't feel committed to the graphical sector. I work for Van Eert (name of the organization) and I do not feel affinity with the rest of the graphical sector.

Interviewee 4 works part-time in the design sector. Regarding her commitment at the organization she states that she is very committed and therefore very motivated and ready to be flexible, like coming back to work after working hours to do an extra task. But she also mentions that she can compensate that another time. She feels both emotional and continuity commitment, since she has invested a lot and also wants to profit from it. Regarding her occupational commitment she states that because she does her job in the organization she likes, she feels committed to both.

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): I work in design and because I like my company I feel both committed to my company and to my occupation.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): I'm very loyal to my job. I like what I do and I want to do it properly. I don't feel the same regarding the organization. If I can do the same job at another organization that is closer to my home for example, I would take it. So the loyalty towards my organization is little, but loyalty towards my job, yes, I do experience that.

Male, 56 years (interviewee 20): You have to do your job of course. You have to do what is expected from a skilled worker.

Another interviewee who's working as a freelancer for an organization commented on her status and how it influences her commitment to both the organization she works for and her occupation. For her, organizational and occupational commitment are two completely separate constructs. She likes her profession, but she does not feel committed to her organization because she does not always agree with them and because of the bad terms of employment. This makes her feel uncommitted to her organization. The organization is for her the place where you earn money. However, she states that this does not influence the way she feels about her profession.

Female, 49 years (interviewee 5): I like my job, but in comparison with other occupations it is not well-paid and the terms of employment are very bad. So that's why I don't feel committed to the organization I'm working for. I have more affinity with my occupation.

Male, 55 years (interviewee 29): My job is my hobby, my passion.

5.3.2 Affective commitment towards the organization

Almost half of all interviewees expressed an affective bond with their organization. Interviewee 1 has worked at his current organization right from the start and explains how he feels about the organization.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): I feel emotionally very attached to the organization, especially because we were a small organization in the beginning so I've seen the whole process. The growth we've known for the past few years, well, it gives me satisfaction to contribute to that. We've also had hard times economically in the past, now it's like that again, but we've experienced it before. Then you feel very attached

to the company, you're hoping that things will get better. In the past few years, it feels like the organization is part of you. They really involve you in decisions regarding the future of the organization. In the past this was even stronger, because now the organization has grown and things have changed.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 3): It's from a kind of emotion I think. You've shared good times and bad times together, like in a marriage, then you also have ups and downs, the same is true for your job, but finally it's about the sum of the whole. I've worked in another organization before where I was paid a lot more, but on Sunday afternoon I started being unhappy because I thought about going to work on Monday. I don't have that feeling at all here and that's worth a lot.

Interviewee 17 states that he is worried about his job and the survival of his organization, since the survival of his organization means his own survival. However, he states that he is emotionally committed to his organization and that he feels a special bond with the organization after having worked there for the past ten years.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): I feel emotionally attached, I've been working here for the past ten years and you do get a bond with the organization. And when you see it's not going well, well, it gives you an unpleasant feeling.

Interviewee 21 feels highly committed to his organization and is proud that at whatever department he is working, he is always one of the fastest and simply wants to do his job well.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 21): I always say, what I'm doing here is part of myself. I really feel involved.

5.3.3 Continuance commitment

Twelve older employees stated that they stay with their organization because they have built up a lot of financial advantages over the years and that they would lose it if they would leave. They mentioned that they do their work, but don't do more than what the organization asks them to do. The interviewees stated that they are waiting for their retirement and that they will take it when the benefits are highest.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): Because I've invested quite a bit I'll stay. And I'm not the only one, it's the same for my colleagues, for lots of people I know.

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): My commitment is a cost-benefit analysis. I've build up a lot over the years and I do want to take advantage of it.

5.3.4 Change in commitment

Four interviewees reported a change in commitment over the years as a result of a changing policy, reorganization or changing nature of their tasks. In the present study this was always “downwards”, from affective commitment to continuance commitment as a result of a change in the working environment or the ambiance at work.

Interviewee 8 stated that her negative perception of HR practices also had a negative impact on her organizational commitment. While she felt first emotionally committed, this changed and became continuance commitment. She did not really care anymore about the decisions the organization took and did not care about them in general. However, this negative perception of HR practices did not influence her occupational commitment.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 8): In the beginning I felt emotionally attached, but later on it became a cost-benefit analysis, like, ok, I'll go to work. Because the policy did not suit me (focus on figures, no interest in the people working for the organization), my commitment changed as well.

Interviewee 16 explains that his organization was taken over by someone else and that this decreased his motivation.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 16): I've always enjoyed my job, but when the organization was taken over by someone else my motivation decreased drastically. From, say, 90% to 3%.

5.3.5 Factors influencing organizational commitment

Several factors that influence organizational commitment have been identified in the data. One of them is recognition and respect. Clearly, the more the older employees feel valued the more willing they are to go the extra mile, to give their 100 percent. Interviewee 2 explains how disappointed he was after his illness and how this has influenced his commitment towards the organization.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): You'll never show as much effort if you feel that there is no interest from above. Why would you put yourself out if the organization doesn't care about you?

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): I feel strongly involved and therefore I'm happy to put quite a bit of effort, be flexible and work a bit more after work if necessary.

Interviewee 13 states that he is strongly committed to his job when he has to work more hours during busy or difficult periods, that doing so is absolutely no problem for him.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): I feel committed to the job that has to be done. Also in busy times, working overtime, that stuff, I'm always there, I'm willing to work in difficult times.

Interviewee 19 states that he feels very committed as a result of the fact that the organization involves him so much in the way they work. He mentions that it is easy to see what they did with the comments and suggestions of employees.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 19): We come up with advice to improve things and they do listen to it. It doesn't mean that they'll always do it, but they're interested. It's not like, we decide and that's how it's going to be done.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): I like my job. That is beyond dispute, otherwise I would be looking for another job. But recognition is a thread through your work of course. If there's no recognition, well, you do your job, but you won't do more than that, you won't do over-hours or something extra. That's how it is for most people.

5.4 Research issue 4

Another research issue dealt with the following question: how do older employees describe their job performance? 3 interviewees stated that they always give their 100 percent at work and that their job performance depends exclusively on their capabilities, while about half of them explain that when they have a positive perception of the organization and when they enjoy their jobs they react to it by going the extra mile and being flexible, while employees who have a negative perception about their job or organization react by doing only the minimum. Interviewee 2 felt little recognition when he became ill after 17 years and got so little attention of the organization. But he adds that this did not come as a surprise, since he has seen this before with other colleagues. He knew someone who worked at the organization for 26 years and got some health problems. The lack of recognition he felt after his illness has totally changed his view of the organization.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): Especially after having been ill, my attitude has changed. I don't have the intention to give myself for 200% anymore when you see how little interest they express in you when you get ill.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): I like my job, so I always give my 100% and I try to do my work well. I go the extra mile, because they appreciate me.

Interviewee 11 is unemployed at the moment, but has worked for 11 years at his previous organization that went bankrupt two weeks before the interview took place.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 11): I just do my job. If I have to clean or whatever, I don't care, I'll perform similarly. I always give myself for 100%.

Male, 56 years (interviewee 20): I think that you always try to do your best, within your personal capacities.

Interviewee 8 explained that when she worked in the advertisement industry where they have negative preconceived ideas about older employees, she felt less motivated to show all her capacities, affecting her job performance.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 8): When you're not happy at work you're less

motivated to show what you can. You do what is expected, but that's it. You won't do more than that.

Interviewee 30 tells that he has a small own business as a designer and that when the organization gets orders that they can not do themselves that the organization never looks at him to take over this order. He states that he has mentioned it several times, but that he has stopped since the organization is clearly not interested, that they always ask other organizations to take over such orders. He states that he is disappointed about that and that it has influenced his attitude towards the organization.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): I do my work and nothing more. In the past I've taken initiatives to improve things at work, but they did not appreciate it, so well, then it stops.

Male, 55 years (interviewee 29): If you have the impression that you're too much, then it doesn't make sense to do something. But if you feel recognized you're happy to walk a bit faster so now and then. If you enjoy something you perform better than when you don't like what you're doing.

5.5 Research issue 5

The last research issue was about which factors influence the retirement decision of the older employees under study. The different factors are outlined below after a brief section on the age at which they would like to retire.

5.5.1 Retirement age

Most interviewees in this study expressed the wish to retire around the age of 60, which is about 5 years before the legal retirement age and also the age at which most interviewees think they could realistically retire.

5.5.2 Factors influencing the retirement decision

The decision to retire or stay in the workforce is an important decision that influences many aspects of one's life. It is therefore not a surprise that many different factors influence this decision which affects one's professional life as well as one's

family, personal life, psychological state and financial situation to name a few. The last research issue was: which factors influence the retirement decision?

Although many different factors were mentioned by interviewees, some patterns emerged from the data. An overview of the main factors influencing the retirement decision is given below, while providing both the mainstream patterns found as well deviations from these patterns. I made a distinction between financial considerations, health, factors related to one's psychological state, personal development factors, social factors, factors related to pleasure and joy and organizational factors.

5.5.3 Financial considerations

Regarding financial considerations, six interviewees stated they wished to keep a certain living standard after retirement and they therefore continued a little longer in employment than strictly needed. They mentioned they have the possibility financially to exercise hobbies, go on holidays etcetera because they are still working or that they are used to a certain salary and that this would change if they would retire. Twenty-four interviewees said they simply had to continue working to survive and others stated financial considerations had no importance whatsoever. It is important to note here that the population under study has an average low occupational status. As a result, financial considerations are important to many of them.

5.5.4 Desire to keep a certain standard of living

Money allows people to have a certain standard of living. The desired financial resources are subjective and personal and therefore subject to an individual reflection on what income one wishes to receive after retirement. It is clear that the older employees under study do take these considerations into account.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): When you retire at the age of 63, you have to give up part of your full pension. And to me it's important to keep a certain standard of living, a certain income, also when I retire. So I prefer to continue working till I'm eligible to the full pension scheme.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): I'm working 4 days a week and I've a nice salary. When you retire, this income stops as well.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 11): Salary is also important to me. You're used to a certain salary and you have to give up quite a bit if you retire early.

5.5.5 Necessity

For twenty-four interviewees finances were a very important factor when considering retirement. For some of them it was simply impossible to consider early retirement as a result of their financial obligations.

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): You keep working out of necessity. To earn a living.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 21): I have to continue working, because I have financial obligations.

However, some other employees explained that financial factors were not an issue. This was especially the case for dual-income families.

Female, 48 years (interviewee 7): Finances do not play a role. But I'm in a position to say that. We're well off, my husband works fulltime as well and we don't have kids. We've saved some money over the years, so money would not influence my retirement decision. Free time is more important to me.

Interviewee 9 is self-employed and works 8 hours for herself. When her organization closed down, she was forced to stop as well and she started her own business, because she simply enjoys doing something.

Female, 51 years (interviewee 9): I don't have to work. It's nice that I bring in some money, but it's not necessary. When you're young you work for money, after the age of 50 you work for your pleasure. I'm lucky to have a partner who earns enough.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): We're in a luxury position financially. My wife also has a very good job, so financially I could stop working, that's no problem.

5.5.6 Health

Health is important to twenty-eight older employees. Since many jobs in the industries under study are physically quite demanding, health is an issue. 60% of older employees can not imagine continuing their physically or mentally strenuous job for many years. They also do not want to be worn-out before they retire, so in a more indirect way they want to make sure to stay in good health to be able to enjoy retirement afterwards.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): Health can be an important point. Maybe I won't be able to do everything physically when I'm 60 anymore, or maybe I do.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): In the end of my fifties I think it's quite enough. That doesn't mean I won't do anything at all, but I can't imagine that I'm still doing the same work at the age of 65, 66. I'm mentally fit, so I can't imagine that they'll give me a boring job because my production decreases. If that would be the case I would prefer to stop completely, then I would prefer to be useful at home.

Male, 56 years (interviewee 20): I started working at the age of 14 and I have always worked ever since. That's not problematic, but at a certain moment your age starts playing a role. I might be young in my head, your body gets older.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 16): 60 seems a good age to retire to me. Then you're not fully worn-out yet and still able to do something.

5.5.7 Psychological factors

Some psychological forces also influenced the retirement decision of older employees. There are two main points mentioned here and these will be explained below.

5.5.8 Being used to the idea to retire at a certain age

One factor that appeared to influence the retirement decision of interviewees are first of all the fact that they have always had a certain retirement age in their head and that they would have liked to retire at that particular age. This was the case for a third of the interviewees. There existed an early retirement scheme in the Netherlands that stated that one could stop working after 40 years of labor. So many older employees

got used to the idea of stopping work at a certain age. However, when the government abandoned the early retirement scheme, many employees had to work longer than expected.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): In the past we had the early retirement scheme and I was used to the idea that I was going to retire at that age. When I'm 63 it's done, I'm going to enjoy my free time. But when they stopped the early retirement scheme, you're angry, because you helped paying for it for years and then you can't take advantage of it. I started working when I was young and when I'm 63 I've worked for 46 years and I think that's a fair number of years.

Male, 56 years (interviewee 20): You know, I've always had in mind to retire at 60, but now I think I'll be able to retire at the age of 65 only.

5.5.9 Contribution made

Another factor mentioned by eight older employees is that they feel they have made their contribution to society. After having worked a certain number of years, often 40, they simply state it has been enough.

Male, 50 years (interviewee 10): Around the age of 60, 62, I think I've made my contribution. Then I've worked for 40 years and in the past you could stop after 40 years.

5.5.10 Personal development factors

Regarding the factors that influence the intention of older employees to stay in the workplace or retire, six interviewees stated that their job is a way to give meaning to their lives. The interviewees explained that it simply fills up their days and that they can not imagine being at home five days a week. They state that they want to contribute to society, that they can have some added value and be useful. Work is central to their identity and therefore important.

5.5.11 Sense of accomplishment

Working gives a sense of accomplishment to employees. Evidence from this study suggests it makes employees feel useful and proud and can be an important reason to keep on working.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 3): You have to get some satisfaction from your job. For me, this satisfaction comes from the sense of accomplishment, that you get a new client, that you increase the margin on a product.

5.5.12 Having something to do

Work structures one's life. It gives one something to do during the day. Three interviewees mentioned that they kept on working partially for this reason.

Interviewee 30 is both working as an employee at an organization and has his own small business.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): I can't miss my work, I don't care what type of job I'll do, even outside the graphical sector, but as long as I can continue my own business at the same time I'd like to continue. I want to have something to do. If I can't find another job, I'll do some volunteering work.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 26): I wouldn't want to be home whole days. I can't imagine not to work. I'd get numbed, you're looking for a way fill your days, it's a bit of self-development.

5.5.13 Staying sharp and up-to-date

Working also means staying up-to-date, learning new things to be able to continue exercising your job. It makes you stay sharp, knowledgeable about the newest developments and that is something that five interviewees enjoyed.

Interviewee 6 explains that she knows what is going on in the world and thinks if you stop working you have to be active to keep yourself updated by reading newspapers and magazines. She feels she stays more up-to-date because she has a job and also has the impression that you follow better new developments, like new computer programs. She has been working for this organization for two years and has learnt a new program. Although she feels that all those programs are quite similar, she enjoys the fact that she manages to learn something new. Another point she enjoys is that it is an international company and she has to send mails to people all over the world. She is still amazed to receive an answer from Asia five minutes after having sent a mail, and although it is getting normal, she still thinks it is fun and she knows she would not experience those things if she would not be working anymore.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 6): I think you're more part of society when you are working. You're more active, that's why I enjoy working. I'm sharper, I'm more up-to-date regarding many things. If I wouldn't be working I wouldn't experience all those things anymore.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 11): We've followed some courses and admittedly, it's quite interesting. You stay informed about new things.

5.5.14 Be part of society and have a meaningful job

Being part of society can be important to older employees. Feeling useful and having the impression to add something to society was found to be important. Although this can be found in voluntary work as well, it is an important point to consider when thinking about retirement for six interviewees in this study.

Interviewee 25 tells that his attitude towards life has changed drastically after having been ill. That he is less ambitious now, although he wants to make a contribution with the knowledge and experience he has. He mentions he would have liked most of all to make a contribution to the organization in the sense that he could use his knowledge that he has acquired over the years to improve the workplace, to help colleagues and other departments. He explains he knows he can still be a useful employee, but the pace of the work is too high for him in his current job. He explains that he has mentioned all this, that the organization knows it, but that they do not listen and do not put an effort to make the necessary changes.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): With everything that has happened to me, I hope to be able to get out and about. Be part of society, bring added value.

Interviewee 18 works in the child welfare industry, after having worked in the creative industry.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): I want to have the feeling to do something meaningful.

5.5.15 Social factors

Social factors are important in the decision to retire. Good contact with colleagues and clients were mentioned, as well as the professional situation of their partner.

5.5.16 Contact with colleagues and clients

In this study, twenty-three interviewees mentioned the importance of colleagues. They like seeing their colleagues and the contact with different people. Also, a reduced social network outside the organization has been associated with a preference for late retirement, since they heavily rely on their social network at the organization.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): I think the social aspect is the main factor to keep on working, working with colleagues.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 24): Contact with colleagues is important, it's part of your life and it's of increasing importance since we all have to work longer.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 19): Contact with clients, it's varied and you meet very different people.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 26): I think that if I would be home five days a week, that I would go mad. I think it's good to get out and about instead of being on your own at home. Your colleagues, you hear different stories, you meet other people, etc. At home you're only with your family, that seems a bit limited to me.

5.5.17 Partners

Another social factor is having a partner that is working or retired. 12 older employees state that they want to retire at the same time as their spouse or that they can imagine that they would want to continue working longer if their relationship would end. Interviewee 13 explains how a change in one's personal situation could influence the retirement decision.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): Your personal situation can change so that you might want to work longer than expected. I'm in a stable relationship at the moment, but if we would break up for example and that I would stay on my own and have

nothing to do, well, I can imagine that I wouldn't mind to work another few years in that case.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 18): My partner is my age and also still working. But I can imagine that when she retires, that I would consider doing the same. Not that I would automatically stop as well, but it would become something to think about.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): My wife is still working and we decided to retire at the same time. She's three years younger than I am.

5.5.18 Pleasure

Twenty interviewees in the present study mentioned pleasure as an important factor regarding their intention to either stay in the workforce or withdraw from it by retiring early. The older employees state that if they did not experience pleasure working at their current organization, they would rather stop working and do some volunteering work, than that they would stay at their organization. They state that because they like their jobs, they would not mind to keep working and that they would stop as soon as they would not enjoy their work anymore. Five of the interviewees stated that they are passionate about their job, that they are proud of what they do and that it is their hobby.

5.5.19 Good ambiance

Findings suggest that a good atmosphere at work is important to employees. It is important that colleagues treat each other in a nice and respectful way, that a boss listens to the needs and wishes of older employees and that one considers one's job as challenging. Four interviewees stated that as long as they feel challenged, they will keep on working and that they rather enjoy the technological advancements in their field.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): I like my job, I enjoy it. I've nice colleagues, we treat each other correctly. There are few problems related to human resources. The ambiance is good.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 3): I have a real nice boss and I know not everyone can say that.

Female, 50 years (interviewee 4): I like doing my work. It's also a challenge to do it properly each time.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 14): It's still interesting enough as a result of the constant flow of new developments.

5.5.20 Enjoys current situation

Twenty-four older employees simply enjoy their work and they stress the importance of having a job that one enjoys doing. For some interviewees, it is even their hobby or passion. Interviewee 9 is self-employed and only keeps on working because she enjoys it.

Female, 51 years (interviewee 9): You have to want to keep on working, you have to enjoy it. I think that when you don't enjoy your work, it's really hard to continue. If my own business is not going to work out I'll only accept a job that I truly enjoy and if not, I prefer to do some volunteering work than doing something I don't like. I also want to work part-time, because I need a lot of time for hobbies outside work.

Male, 50 years (interviewee 10): It's a pleasure to go to work. Some days less than others of course, but I never hate going to work.

Male, 54 years (interviewee 17): I still like my job, so it's a pleasure to work for another few years.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 11): Work is my hobby.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 21): My occupation is a passion. When I've made something, I'm proud of it.

5.5.21 Organizational factors

Regarding the factors that influence their retirement decision, Twenty-four interviewees in this study mentioned some organizational factors like doing simple work that is mentally and physically little challenging or tools that make the job physically less demanding. 30% of the interviewees also mentioned that the fact that

going to work is a choice would affect their retirement decision. They would like to continue working because they want to, not because they have to. Voluntariness is thus important. Other factors mentioned that would influence interviewees' retirement decision were flexible work arrangements like working part-time, limited hours, being able to take days off more easily, not having to work shifts, work from home or working on special projects designed to help younger employees or becoming a trainer. Some older employees stated that the job should be more challenging and that tasks assigned should be more varied in order to keep older employees motivated. Two interviewees mentioned that organizations should adapt jobs for older employees in order to protect them because, they say, older employees do not have the same capacities as their younger counterparts. Being able to climb up the ladder has also a positive effect on the intention to stay in the workforce for some employees, while others simply want to feel valued and recognized for what they are currently doing without feeling any pressure to learn new skills or increase their competencies.

5.5.22 Recognition and respect

The present study suggests that the older employees that receive respect and recognition are happy to stay with their organization, whilst employees who do not experience recognition and respect are looking for another organization where they will feel valued.

Interviewee 9 stresses the importance of a pleasant working climate and recognition.

Female, 51 years (interviewee 9): I think that when you get recognized and the ambiance at work is good, you stay in the workforce. As soon as you get the impression that you don't get recognized anymore, that younger employees do not take you seriously anymore, that you start considering retirement if it's financially possible. I think if an organization sends a signal to older employees by stimulating and respecting them, that people do extend their working life.

Interviewee 29 has always worked in the graphical sector, but currently works as fulltime coach in a social workplace.

Male, 55 years (interviewee 29): I think that recognition is very important. If people recognize your work and you want to continue, there is no reason to stop working.

Interviewee 27 explains that things like bad planning and too little communication with customers disappoints him and makes him feel less engaged and less caring. He explains that a younger employee might become angry about those things, but that he simply does not care anymore and that he will continue working as long as he has to. However, he does state that he would change job as soon as he finds an organization that recognizes and respects his knowledge and experience.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 27): I've worked well, but it doesn't get recognized. Well, I hope to meet an organization one day that says; yes, I can use your knowledge.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): What's important to us (older employees), and I think that's true for many of us, that you are respected and that people listen to you.

Male, 49 years (interviewee 2): The way of doing things is so bad. It even disturbs us to do our work properly. Most people would agree with that. They don't listen. They have their own rules and we are supposed to follow them, although we might have ideas to improve the production process after all those years of practical experience.

5.5.23 Jobs with fewer responsibilities

Simple, small jobs with fewer responsibilities that ask less both mentally and physically from older employees are something that ten of them desire. Five older employees state that they would like to continue working even after the legal retirement age if only they could decide themselves on their workload and the number of hours they work. It should be noted here that many older employees are already offered 'small' jobs in the Netherlands. In 2007 only 10% of older employees wished to work fewer hours than they were currently working.

Interviewee 9 has started her own business does not know when she will retire. As long as she is her own boss and she can decide on her own workload, she will continue working, although she thinks that she would like to do something else in 15 years time, when she will be 66. If her own business fails she would like to start working again, but only if she truly likes the job and only part-time, because there are too many other things she would like to continue doing.

Female, 51 years (interviewee 9): There is no age at which I wish to retire. Maybe never, it depends. There's no limit as long as I can decide myself on the pressure of work.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 1): I'm now working on a printer with 4 colors and I'd like to work on a printer with 2 colors. So really easy work, that's mentally less challenging. If that would be available, I might consider working another year. Or other facilities to make the work physically less hard.

Female, 48 years (interviewee 7): A small job, with few hours, very flexible and part-time. Two days a week supporting or training people or doing a special project.

Female, 53 years (interviewee 8): I'd like to work less hours a day and have more possibilities to take days off and work from home.

Interviewee 15 states that the organization looks carefully at the working conditions for older employees, that the job is not too hard physically, that they get new machines to make the work easier. He states that this is important for him, but that he can see that his young boss does all he can to take into account the needs and wishes of all employees.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 15): To me it's important that they try to make the work physically less challenging. I mean, the modern technology can do a lot nowadays. I don't want to force myself, both mentally and physically. It's important to me that they look at what someone can handle and that they adapt the work accordingly. What I'm currently doing isn't hard, so I can easily continue. But I do have an irregular working schedule, if they could change my schedule, I'd like to work a few more years.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 24): It's hard to keep up with all these developments, all those new techniques. You have to understand it, grasp it. And then you have to work with it. I can imagine that, at a certain moment, for some people, it's too much. That you can't follow it anymore. I think that when you realize that it's too much, that it should be possible to do a step back.

5.5.24 Voluntary character of retirement decision

Ten interviewees mentioned that they do not mind continuing to work if it is their choice. Working out of pleasure, without *having* to work changes a lot. The voluntary character, or in other words the perceived control over the retirement decision seems therefore to be important. Interviewee 7 states that she can imagine doing some voluntary work or keep on doing a little job, with the emphasizes on being allowed to and not having to.

Female, 48 years (interviewee 7): The only condition I put is that work is a without obligation. That it's not compulsory.

5.5.25 Flexibility

Flexibility seems to become more and more important as one gets older. Fifteen interviewees state that they want less meetings and get more freedom to execute their tasks. A wish of more freedom regarding the execution of tasks was expressed by four interviewees. Some employees in the present study seem to enjoy organizations that take their opinion and advice into account when deciding on how to execute a certain task. As a result, they feel more involved and valued. 12 interviewees wish more flexibility in their working hours.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 11): The organization does not ask if you have a better or simpler way of executing a task. They (the employers) decide how you should make something. They do not use the experience that older employees have. They should give more freedom in the execution of tasks.

Interviewee 9 is self-employed and enjoys the flexibility of being her own boss.

Female, 51 years (interviewee 9): I'm an evening person. I want to be able to work in the evenings and do things for myself in the morning. I want to be able to work whenever I want it, even during the night. I work a lot with the computer, I don't depend on other people that I have to phone or whatsoever. Flexibility is very important to me. If I could work from home for a boss I would enjoy that. I think that's related to my age. In the past I enjoyed working with colleagues, but that's declining with age. The older you get, the less you want meetings with others. You want to do your own thing and employers should offer variety to older employees to

keep them motivated and to keep them away from retiring.

Interviewee 11 argues for a workplace that would protect older employees. He thinks it would be reasonable that older employees do not do the same job or the same hours as younger employees, since he feels that he is simply not the same as when he was 18 years of age. He would have liked to see adaptations for older employees, like a work environment that is less hectic, the possibility to work four instead of five days a week and the possibility to work not only in the production, but also do different, less strenuous tasks.

Male, 59 years (interviewee 11): They can adapt the work a bit. Make it easier, less intensive for older employees. They need a calmer workplace. I think that it's correct to offer special projects to work on for employees over 55 and also the possibility to work 4 days.

Interviewee 27 explains that he likes most the technical part of his job and that he would not mind to work a little longer if he could only keep on doing this part he enjoys most and that includes very diverse tasks.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 27): I can continue the technical execution I'm doing till I'm 70, I really like that part of my job and it's varied. I would like to work less, I want to keep only those tasks I enjoy. If I could do only that, I wouldn't mind working longer.

5.5.26 Doing something completely different

Five older workers would want to stay longer in the workforce if they could do something completely different what they fully enjoy, either by changing sector or by the use of an internal job change. Two other interviewees state that if they simply could work less days, they could use their days off for their personal development, which would prevent them from retiring.

Interviewee 13 explains that he would not mind to work a little longer under certain circumstances. He states that he would like to do something completely different. He explains that he has never worked somewhere else and that he could imagine that a complete career change would make him want to continue working longer if he would fully enjoy it. He mentions doing something with cars, like working in a

garage, although he adds that it is a risky business nowadays.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 13): I wouldn't mind to work one or two years longer if I could work half days, decide myself on my working hours and do not have to work shifts. I'm thinking about doing something completely different sometimes. I've worked for such a long time in the creative industry, I would like to try something new, it would be a stimulus to extend my working life. But it has to be something that I enjoy for 100% of course.

Interviewee 26 would like to work four days a week to be able to follow courses to become qualified for a different profession one day a week while still being active and earning money. However, he states that if he would do it that way, he would be almost sixty when he would be ready for his new career which would not make sense. He finally states that if he would work four days a week he could simply do something else which would keep him motivated to keep on working in his present job until retirement.

Male, 53 years (interviewee 26): They don't have to stimulate me to keep on working, but if they could offer me to work four days I'd definitely continue longer than I planned, since I could use this day off for my personal development which would keep me very motivated.

Male, 57 years (interviewee 30): I've expressed the wish to demote. I'd like to bring around the post, be more in contact with people. So I'd like an internal job change.

5.5.27 Desire for a focus on experience instead of age

Fifteen interviewees stated that organizations should focus more on the skills and experience instead of on the age of an employee. They stated that many organizations do not give the chance to older employees to let them show what they can. Other interviewees mentioned that organizations do not adapt the work to older employees and that many older employees stop while they could have continued if the organization would have made some slight adaptations to their tasks.

Interviewee 22 states that organizations do not look at work experience, although he has the impression that this mentality is changing. He states organizations still look at the finances first. He tells he has been angry about it, that older employees with

lots of experience do not find a job anymore and that they often start doing repetitive production work, simply to earn some money. He would like to see that companies start looking more at talent, experience, knowledge and skills instead of age. He suggests that organizations hire the most competent person instead of the cheapest one.

Male, 47 years (interviewee 22): There is a lot a talent that has a lot to offer but simply do not get the chance to show what they can. They go in the production, because others consider them too old. They could improve it by focusing less on age and more on talent or work experience.

Interviewee 25 has been ill and he has restarted working on the basis of reintegration. He explains that on the one hand this is going well, but that he is disappointed on the other hand by the fact that his organization tries so little to adapt the workplace for him. He states that he has explained that some tasks have become impossible after his surgery, but the policy of the organization forces him simply to reintegrate in the same function he did before his surgery.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): They say: hey, don't exaggerate, just keep on working. But, you're simply getting older. And if they don't provide support to facilitate physically hard tasks, people will start think like, well, get lost.

5.5.28 Communication

Communication is a big point of dissatisfaction among older employees. Two third state organizations often do not listen to them when interviewees have an idea to improve a production process. Five interviewees also mentioned organizations communicate very little about how things are going.

Male, 54 (interviewee 17): To me there is very little communication from above about how things are going, the policy for the future, that kind of stuff. They communicate too little. It gives me a feeling of uncertainty especially during the current economic crisis. I see that the organization gets less orders, and then people start telling stories that might be true or not and the organization doesn't do anything to say if it's true or not. It makes me feel uncertain, also because I'm at an age where it becomes increasingly difficult to find another job.

Interviewee 25 states he would not mind working longer if he would be working at an organization that listens to what he has to say, with more communication between employees and employers about the wishes of employees and how they can take them into account.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 25): I don't like my job at the moment. I'm far too young to stop working of course, but I'd like to stop at the age of 57. Well, I'd like to work longer, but in order to function properly you have to communicate. It's important that employers and employees get round the table and talk about what you want. But they don't and that's why people want to retire so early.

5.5.29 Growth possibilities

Although it is sometimes assumed that older employees are not interested in training anymore, for four interviewees growth possibilities are an important consideration that can enhance their wish to keep on working a few more years.

Male, 52 years (interviewee 24): You spend a great part of your life at work, so self-development is important.

Male, 51 years (interviewee 28): It's also important to get the chance to increase your know-how, although you're over 50. To maintain cordial relations.

Male, 47 years (participant 22): That you can grow within the organization, especially if the job suits you.

5.6 Comparison low versus high occupational group

The qualitative study is based on 30 interviews. As shown in the table below, 6 interviewees had a rank 1 occupation, 16 a rank 2, 6 a rank 3 and 2 a rank 4.

Table 5.2: Rang of the occupations according to ISCO-08 in the qualitative study

Rang	Percentage	Number
1	20%	6 interviewees
2	53,3%	16 interviewees
3	20%	6 interviewees
4	6,7%	2 interviewees

The interviewees were divided in two groups (rank 1 & 2 versus rank 3 & 4) and their perceptions and experiences were compared. This gave an “on average low occupational group”, containing rank 1 and 2 and an “on average high occupational group”, containing rank 3 and 4. The following table shows which interviewees belonged to rank 1 and 2 and which ones belonged to rank 3 and 4.

Table 5.3: Interviewees in the two occupational groups

Rank	Interviewees
1 & 2	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30
3 & 4	3, 10, 12, 15, 19, 21, 22, 26

Hereunder the findings of the additional analysis are discussed. It is important to note that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a meaningful comparison between two groups that are very small in size (22 versus 8 interviewees). As a consequence, the findings depicted below should be interpreted with caution and are subject to future research to study possible differences in more detail.

There are both differences and similarities between the two groups, although the differences are small and possibly the result of coincidence. It seems that the average low occupational group has more problems keeping up with the current developments in the creative industry and also finds the changes in the industry hard to deal with. Furthermore, age discrimination and the negative stereotypes are mentioned more frequently in this group, so having a double disadvantage (being old and having a low occupational status) might be an obstacle for them. However, the finding that the provision of HR practices is seen as a stamp that they belong to the devalued social group of “older employees” is true for both groups. Regarding the different HR practices, having more flexible work options is maybe desired in the lower occupational group, but simply impossible due the characteristics of their jobs. For job design, the physical hardship is mentioned by both groups and for training the experiences differ from individual from individual, without a clear distinction between the two occupational groups. No differences were found for recognition and respect, and there were also no differences regarding commitment and job performance. Finally, about which factors influence the retirement decision of the interviewees, there were only slight differences. Finances seemed more important to the first group, which is probably the result of the on average lower salaries they have. At the same time, it seems that many of the interviewees in the low occupational group are happy with their job, experience pleasure and get a sense of

satisfaction from it, like interviewees 3 and 10. So it is important to note that the low occupational group does not have more negative experiences than the group with an on average higher occupational status.

To summarize, there are some small differences like more difficulty to deal with the characteristics of the creative industry, a stronger emphasis on finances when it comes to their retirement decision and more frequently reported age discrimination and negative stereotypes. However, regarding the HR practices, their perception is quite similar and in both groups some interviewees are satisfied and unsatisfied. The differences are therefore small, as a result of the extremely small groups that makes a comparison almost impossible. As a consequence of the size of the groups and the small differences found, it is necessary to conduct more research in order to see if those differences really exist or if they are based on coincidences.

5.7. Summary of the results

This section will briefly summarize the main findings of the qualitative part of this thesis. Regarding the first issue about how it is to an older employee nowadays, the interviewees in this study explained that although they feel they have valuable knowledge and skills for organizations, they also feel they are too expensive and feel less ambitious. At the same time, they perceive many changes in the creative industry in the Netherlands: the workplace is becoming more hectic, the ambiance less pleasant, the working hours more strenuous and their occupation less creative. Finally, it seems that many interviewees have experienced age discrimination and feel that negative stereotypes about this group of employees are highly prevalent.

The second research issue about their perception of HR practices shows that many organizations do not provide any special HR practices for older employees and that doing so is often perceived in a negative way in the sense that the interviewees perceive this as a stamp that they now belong to a devalued social group. However, the interviewees mention that they would like to be offered the same practices as any other employee and that especially being able to occupy different roles, more flexible work options and more recognition and respect would be appreciated.

Regarding the third research issue about commitment it seems that all types of commitment exist for the interviewees under study. However, due to the perceived changes in the creative industry, a tendency to shift from affective to continuance commitment can be identified.

Research issue four about job performance shows that although some interviewees perform as well as they can regardless the situation, the job performance of the majority of interviewees seems to depend partially on the treatment they receive from their organization in the sense that they work harder if they have a positive perception about the organization and less if this is not the case.

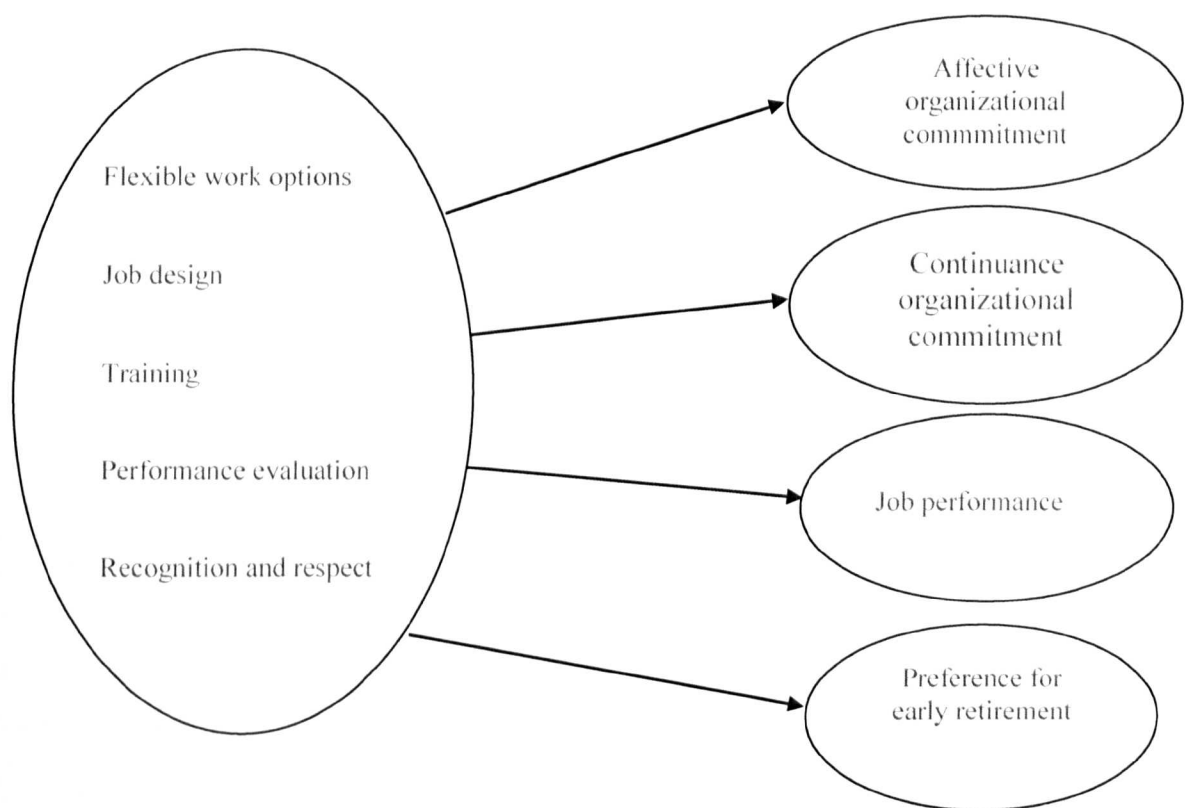
The last research issue, number five, about the factors that influence the retirement decision shows that for most interviewees factors related to finances and health are most important in this decision. However, many other factors related to personal development, social factors and pleasure have been mentioned. Concerning the organizational factors, it seems that the interviewees are looking for more flexibility, more recognition for what they do and better communication.

Finally, differences might exist between the interviewees with a high occupational status compared to interviewees with a lower occupational status, but a clear statement about this can not be made as a result of the small sizes of both groups. It seems that slight differences exist on some matters, but they have to be confirmed in future studies.

5.8. Framework based on qualitative study to be tested quantitatively

The framework below shows the findings of the qualitative study. This framework will be tested in the quantitative analysis. The results of this analysis will be shown in the next chapter. The framework presented here is the same framework presented at the beginning of chapter 3: the literature review. This is because the theoretical model was constructed in three steps: first of all the literature review, secondly the context in which the study took place and how this would change the model of Herrbach et al., (2009) on which my model is based and finally on the results of the qualitative study which mainly determined which HR practices would be included in the quantitative study that was conducted afterwards. However, since the literature review (step 1) and the qualitative study described above (step 3) gave similar results, the framework presented below is the same as the one presented in chapter 3. In other words, the findings of the qualitative study support the findings of previous studies, even if the sample is slightly different: older employees in previous studied versus older employees with a low occupational status in the present study.

Figure 5.1: Model of the qualitative study to be tested in the quantitative study



5.9. Conclusion

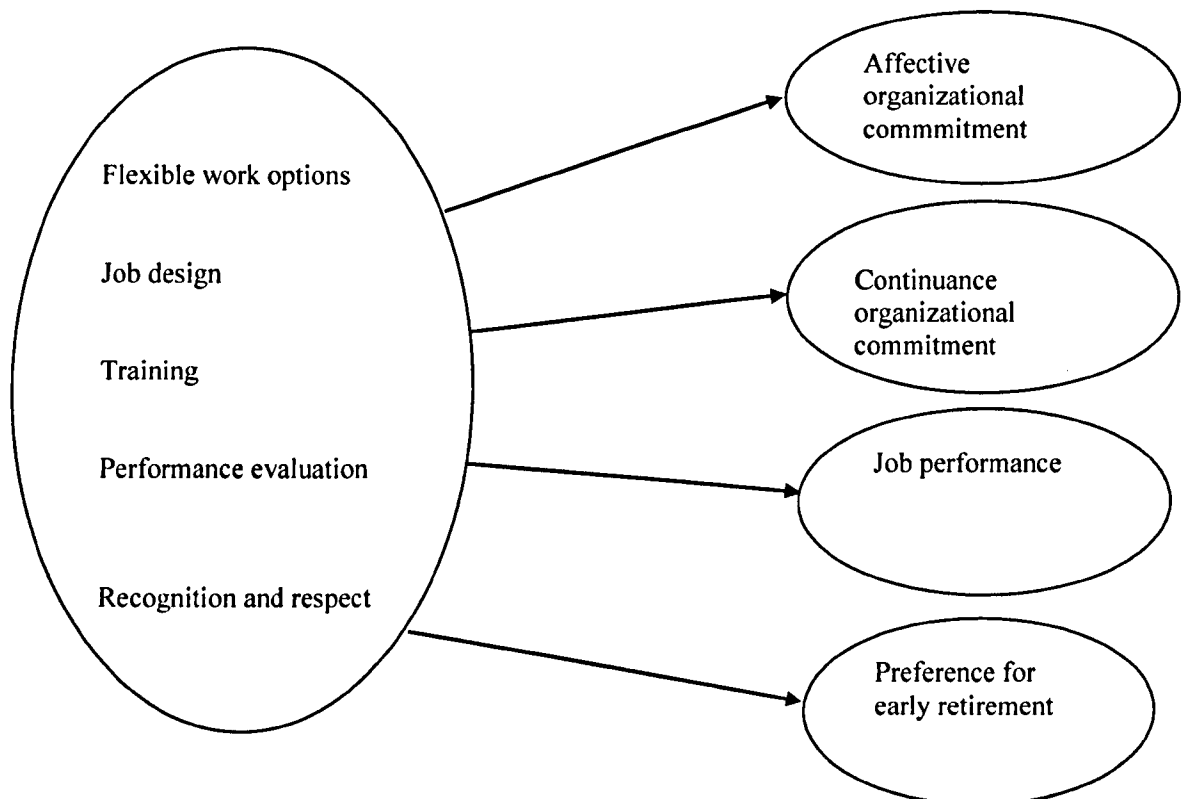
This chapter presented the main results of the qualitative study of this thesis. The patterns found have been outlined and will be linked to the findings of the quantitative study in chapter seven: the discussion and conclusion. The following chapter will deal with the results of the quantitative study.

Chapter 6: Results quantitative study

The study reported here examined the role of perceived quality of HR practices on affective and continuance organizational commitment, job performance and the preference for early retirement among older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands. This chapter presents and analyzes the collected data. It does not draw conclusions and does not compare the results with other findings obtained in previous studies. The next chapter, the discussion and conclusion chapter, will be devoted to the implications and explanations of the obtained results. This chapter presents the results of the quantitative study, the results of the qualitative study were presented in chapter five.

The chapter will start with cleaning the data, presenting how was dealt with missing values and outliers. Then, the descriptive statistics are presented and the assumptions for parametric tests are discussed. Issues related to validity and reliability are outlined and the statistical analysis is presented. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings and a conclusion. The theoretical model is presented below and the results of the quantitative analysis will be discussed afterwards.

Figure 6.1: Model of the quantitative study of this thesis



6.1 Cleaning of the data

Before starting the analysis, the data were screened and cleaned. This chapter will start with a discussion of the pre-analysis and cleaning of the data, before the results will be presented.

6.1.1 Missing values

Missing values were treated on a case-to-case basis. If a participant had more than two missing values that whole case was removed from further analysis. In the case of only one or two missing values the missing score was replaced by the average score for this variable. Downey and King (1998) argued that both item mean and person mean for replacing missing data in Likert scales were good representations of the original data when both the number of participants with missing data and the number of missing items were 20% or less. The number of missing items was $310/21942 = 1.41\%$ which is less than 20%. Although it is likely to suppress the true value of the standard deviation and the standard error, with a large sample size and few missing values this is not very dangerous (Field, 2009). Missing values that could not be replaced (like those for demographic information) were excluded on a pair-wise basis, which means that if a participant has a missing value for one variable, then their data is excluded only from those analyses that involve the variable where the participant has no score. Out of the 460 surveys 414 only had none, one or two missing values, the 46 surveys with more missing items were removed completely from the analysis. 362 surveys were complete, while 52 surveys had one or two missing values. Appendix 6 shows for each question how many missing data there were and how was dealt with them. Out of the 46 surveys that were removed based on the fact that they had more than two missing values, 38 put that the perceived quality of HR practices did not apply to them because they were self-employed. As a result, it is likely that self-employed participants that have received the survey have excluded themselves by not filling out this scale. From the non-excluded participants, three reported being self-employed. $38+3=41$ participants out of 460 is 8.9% which is not far from the reported 16% of self-employed people in the trade union as a whole and the 10% of self-employed interviewees in the qualitative study. From the resting sample of 414 participants, only 3 mentioned to be self-employed but explained they had filled-out the perceived quality of HR practices scale based on their previous non-self-employed jobs. However, it is important to mention this as a weakness, since the researcher cannot be definitely sure that the ones who had more

than two missing values were indeed self-employed, neither that there are not more self-employed participants in the resting 414 surveys that did not write it down. This influences the findings in that it might be that self-employed people have given very negative scores on their perception of the quality of HR practices, lowering the average and influencing the results of the statistical tests that involve this variable.

6.1.2 Outliers

Outliers are scores that are very different to the rest. Outliers are important to detect since they bias the mean and inflate the standard deviation (Field & Hole, 2003). All outliers were re-checked with the original surveys to make sure that the outlier was not the result from a mistake in data entry. Two mistakes were made in the data entry and were corrected. A choice had to be made regarding the outlier: remove the case, transform the data or change the score. It was decided to change the score into the next highest score plus one, as advocated by Field (2009). Fortunately, few outliers were present in the study. Outliers were found only regarding the preference for early retirement scale. Some participants had extreme answers on the questions when they preferred to retire and when they expected to retire (for example expecting to be able to realistically retire at the age of 100, instead of the average of 65). The outliers and the replaced scores can be found in table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Outliers

Outlier score	Variable	New score
100	Expected retirement age	81 (next highest score + 1)
95	Wanted retirement age	81 (next highest score + 1)
100	Wanted retirement age	81 (next highest score + 1)
102	Wanted retirement age	81 (next highest score + 1)

6.1.3 Descriptive statistics before and after cleaning the data

The table below presents part of the information of table 4.1 on page 114. It provides some information on the clean sample used in the quantitative study.

Table 6.2: Demographic information clean sample quantitative study, 414 participants

	In the quantitative study
Age range	45-63
Average age	53
Gender	68% male, 32% female
Self-employed	0,7%

Average ISCO rang	2,65
Rang 1	10,2%
Rang 2	34,9%
Rang 3	24,2%
Rang 4	30,7%
Nationality	97% Dutch
Audiovisual sector	10%
Arts sector	22%
Graphical sector	44%
Prepublishing sector	2%
Packaging sector	8%
Publishers	14%
Other sector	0%
Marital status	77% married, 33% single/widow
Job status	70% fulltime, 30% part-time
Elementary school	4%
Lower general secondary education	26%
Higher General Secondary Education	10%
Pre-university education	3%
Intermediate Vocational Education	27%
Higher Vocational Education	22%
University	9%

The following tables show the descriptive statistics both before the researcher dealt with the outliers and the missing values and after the correction. This shows the difference in means, standard deviation, maximum score and minimum score.

Table 6.3: Descriptive statistics before correction.

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
1. Affective organizational commitment	3.66	1.07	1.00	11.33
2. Continuance organizational commitment	4.20	.76	1.00	5.40
3. Job performance	3.14	.55	1.00	5.00
4. Preference for early retirement	-3.45	5.32	-50.00	36.00
5. Flexible work options	2.62	1.04	1.00	5.00
6. Job design	2.36	.84	1.00	5.00
7. Training	2.38	1.00	1.00	5.00
8. Performance evaluation	2.79	1.01	1.00	5.00
9. Recognition and respect	2.78	1.09	1.00	5.00

Table 6.4: Descriptive statistics after correction.

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
10. Affective organizational commitment	3.66	.98	1.00	5.00
11. Continuance organizational commitment	4.21	.75	1.00	5.00
12. Job performance	3.15	.53	1.00	5.00
13. Preference for early retirement	3.64	3.33	-15.00	25.00
14. Flexible work options	2.78	1.12	1.00	5.00
15. Job design	2.36	.84	1.00	5.00
16. Training	2.39	1.00	1.00	5.00
17. Performance evaluation	2.79	1.02	1.00	5.00
18. Recognition and respect	2.79	1.09	1.00	5.00

The two tables with the descriptive statistics before and after correction show that there are only small differences in the mean and the standard deviation regarding all variables except the variable “preference for early retirement”. Some extreme scores on this factor have been removed, influencing not only the minimum and maximum score but also the mean and the standard deviation. The small differences in some of the other variables are the result of the removal of outliers, missing scores and errors in the data entry. The table below presents the descriptive statistics.

Table 6.5: Descriptive statistics.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Affective organizational commitment	3.66	.98				
2. Continuance organizational commitment	4.21	.75	.14**			
3. Job performance	3.15	.53	.26**	.01		
4. Preference for early retirement	3.64	3.33	.01	-.13**	-.02	
5. Flexible work options	2.78	1.12	.23**	-.03	.23**	.09
6. Job design	2.36	.84	.43**	-.07	.25**	.13**
7. Training	2.39	1.00	.34**	-.01	.26**	.11*
8. Performance evaluation	2.79	1.02	.38**	.00	.29**	.11*
9. Recognition and respect	2.79	1.09	.46**	-.76	.36**	.09

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The table shows the correlation between all dependent and independent variables and also shows the means and the standard deviations. It shows that the participants had an average score of 3.66 (out of 5) in terms of affective organizational commitment and an average score of 4.21 (out of 5) on continuance organizational commitment. Their self-rated job performance showed a mean of

3.15. Affective organizational commitment shows a positive correlation with all HR practices under study ($p < .01$) as well as with continuance organizational commitment and job performance. None of the HR practices showed a significant correlation with continuance organizational commitment, although this type of commitment was found to be correlated with the preference for early retirement. Job performance showed a positive correlation with all HR practices ($p < .01$) but no relationship with a preference for early retirement. Only weak correlations were found between a preference for early retirement and the HR practices related to job design ($p < .01$), training and performance evaluations ($p < .05$).

6.2 Assumptions parametric tests

First, the data set was explored. Since certain assumptions need to be met to use parametric tests, exploring the data is important before deciding which statistical test is appropriate (Field, 2009). The assumptions for parametric tests are normally distributed data, homogeneity of variance, interval data and independence (Field, 2009). Those four assumptions will be looked at in more detail below.

6.2.1 Normally distributed data

Histograms, P-P plots and descriptive statistics were used to check if the data are normally distributed. The results of these can be found in appendix 7. It was found that the data were not normally distributed. However, this is not a problem since the errors should be normally distributed, not the dependent variables themselves (Osborne & Waters, 2002; Field, 2009). The normality of the error terms are provided in appendix 8. The values for skewness and kurtosis should be zero in a normal distribution. Also the Shapiro-Wilk tests was conducted to have another indication about the extent of non-normality. The scores on this test were significant ($p = .00$) on all dependent outcomes, showing that there is non-normality.

Table 6.6: Results of Shapiro-Wilk test

	Statistic	Df	Significance
Affective organizational commitment	.947	400	.000
Continuance organizational commitment	.878	400	.000
Job performance	.877	400	.000
Preference for early retirement	.876	400	.000

The following table reports the statistics of skewness and kurtosis. Skewness quantifies how symmetrical the distribution is. Both affective and continuance

organizational commitment are negatively skewed and have a long tail to the left. This tendency is strongest for continuance organizational commitment. Job performance and the preference for early retirement have more higher values, a longer tail to the right and are thus positively skewed. Kurtosis is a measure of whether the data are peaked or flat relative to a normal distribution. Continuance organizational commitment, job performance and a preference for early retirement have high values, a distinct peak near the mean, decline rapidly and have heavy tails. Affective organizational commitment has a negative kurtosis and thus a flatter distribution. The values of both skewness and kurtosis show that there is no normal distribution.

Table 6.7: Statistics of skewness and kurtosis

	Statistic skewness	Standard error	Statistics kurtosis	Standard error
Affective organizational commitment	-.642	.122	-.225	.243
Continuance organizational commitment	-1.300	.122	2.111	.243
Job performance	.179	.122	2.214	.243
Preference for early retirement	1.531	.122	5.335	.243

6.2.2 Homogeneity of variance

Homogeneity of variance means that variances should be the same throughout the data. This has been tested with Levene's test. The outcomes of this test can be found in the table below. The results are based on untransformed data and the mean. The scores are all non-significant ($p > .05$) indicating that the variances are not significantly different but similar and as such the homogeneity of variance assumption is tenable.

Table 6.8: Results Levene's test

	Levene's statistic	Df1	Df2	Significance
Affective organizational commitment	6.689	1	395	.052
Continuance organizational commitment	2.590	1	395	.108
Job performance	.218	1	395	.641
Preference for early retirement	1.515	1	395	.219

6.2.3 Interval data

All variables have been measured at interval level by the use of 5-point Likert scales. Also, there are no constraints on the variability of the outcome, which means that the variables are unbounded. As such, this assumption has been met.

6.2.4 Independence

Independence means that the behavior of one participant does not influence the behavior of another. Each value of the of the outcome variables comes from a separate entity, since each participant has filled out the survey once and they have done so individually. In other words, there is independence.

6.3 Assumptions generalizability

In order to be able the make generalizations about the findings, several assumptions need to be met: variable types, non-zero variance, no perfect multicollinearity, predictors being uncorrelated with external variables, homoscedascity, normally distributed errors, independence and linearity.

As mentioned above the variables are measured on interval level and the outcome variables were unbounded, because the range of the measure was the same as the actual range found in the study. Regarding the non-zero variance, predictors should have some variation in value which is the case because the possible range is equal to range found in the study. Thirdly, there should not be a perfect linear relationship between the predictors. To check multicollinearity a correlation matrix of the predictor variables can be found below.

Table 6.9: Correlation matrix of all the predictor variables

	Flexible work options	Job design	Training	Performance evaluation	Recognition and respect
Flexible work options	1	.529	.418	.393	.345
Job design	.529	1	.690	.590	.596
Training	.418	.690	1	.661	.585
Performance evaluation	.393	.590	.661	1	.677
Recognition and respect	.345	.596	.585	.677	1

The variables do not seem to correlate very highly. As suggested by Field (2009), the variables should not show correlations of above .80 or .90. The correlation here

ranges from .345 to .690. In order to detect more subtle forms of multicollinearity the variance inflation factor (VIF) has also been calculated. Myers (1990) suggests that a value of 10 is a value at which to worry, while Bowerman and O'Connell (1990) suggest that if the average VIF is substantially greater than 1, then multicollinearity may be biasing the regression model. Also, a tolerance below .1 indicates a problem, while tolerance below .2 indicates a potential problem (Menard, 1995). We can see from the table below that the highest VIF score is 2.436, which is well below 10. Also, the average VIF score is 2.13, which is not far from 1. Furthermore, the tolerance scores are all above .2; therefore, it can be concluded that multicollinearity is not an issue.

Table 6.10: Collinearity statistics

	Tolerance	VIF
Flexible work options	.709	1.411
Job design	.411	2.436
Training	.420	2.383
Performance evaluation	.426	2.345
Recognition and respect	.477	2.098

Another assumption is that predictors should be uncorrelated with variables that have not been included in the regression model which influence the outcome variable. Based on the literature review presented in chapter three it can be assumed that this assumption is met.

Moreover, there should be homoscedasticity which means that the residuals at each level of the predictors should have the same variance. Homogeneity of variance has already been tested using Levene's test. As mentioned earlier, the outcomes of this test were non-significant ($p > .05$) indicating that the variances are not significantly different and that there is homoscedasticity.

Normally distributed errors mean that it is assumed that the residuals in the model are random, normally distributed variables with a mean of zero. Regression plots were conducted of the standardized residuals. These regression plots in the form of histograms can be found in appendix 8 and we can see the assumption of normality of errors is tenable for affective organizational commitment and job performance, but not for continuance commitment and a preference for early retirement. Although the assumption is not met for all outcome variables and the statistical analysis is therefore less robust as would have been the case with this assumption being met, it was decided to use multiple regression. The quantitative study is not a stand-alone study. Since the results of the quantitative study are in line

with what the qualitative study found, the researcher stands on firmer grounds when interpreting the data from a mixed methods approach. Since the results of the multiple regression analysis can be confirmed by the qualitative study, it can be argued that although the assumption of normality of errors has not been fully met, this has not distorted the results.

Independence is another assumption that states that all values of the outcome variable are independent, which has been discussed before. This assumption is met since each value or score comes from a separate entity, from a different participant.

The assumption related to independent errors, or the idea that of two observations residual terms should be uncorrelated, has been tested with the Durbin-Watson test, which tests for correlations between errors. The test statistic can vary from 0 to 4 with a value of 2 meaning that the residuals are uncorrelated, while a higher value indicates a negative correlation and a value below 2 a positive correlation. The table below gives the scores of all dependent outcomes. We can see that all scores are close to 2 indicating that the assumption of independent errors is tenable.

Table 6.11: Results Durbin-Watson test

	Durbin-Watson
Affective organizational commitment	1.978
Continuance organizational commitment	1.230
Job performance	1.864
Preference for early retirement	1.154

The last assumption deals with linearity. Appendix 9 shows the scatterplots of all dependent variables. Since those plots show no curves, it is likely that the data have met the assumption of linearity.

6.4. Reliability

Reliability of the scales used has been established, using Cronbach's alpha (1951). An alpha over .60 is considered as sufficient, and over .80 as good, although it has been argued that values below .7 can be acceptable for psychological constructs because of the diversity of the constructs being measured (Kline, 1999). Cronbach (1951) suggested that if several factors exist then the alpha should be calculated separately for all the subscales. So the alphas for the subscales are given here. The alpha ranged from .73 to .91. Cronbach's alphas can be found in table 6.12. The SPSS output is provided on appendix 12.

Table 6.12: Cronbach's alphas

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Flexible Work Options Scale	.84
Job Design Scale	.80
Training Scale	.90
Performance Evaluation Scale	.89
Recognition and Respect Scale	.89
Affective Organizational Commitment Scale	.91
Continuance Organizational Commitment Scale	.79
Job Performance Scale	.73

6.5.1 Factor analysis

The validity of the scales was tested using factor analysis, a technique for identifying groups or clusters of variables.

In order to determine if factor analysis would be appropriate for the data, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was calculated. A minimum value of .5 is necessary (Kaiser, 1974), while a value between .8 and .9 is considered great (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999). A value of .887 was obtained as can be seen in the table below. Bartlett's test of sphericity needs to be significant so that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix and that there are some relationships between the variables. As can be seen in the table below, Bartlett's test is significant.

Table 6.13: KMO statistics and Bartlett's test for the whole survey

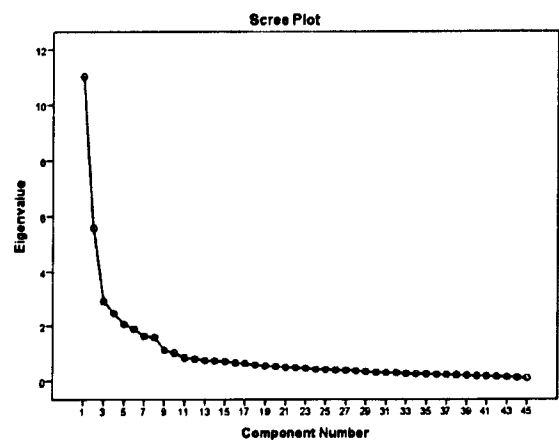
KMO of sampling adequacy	.887
Approximate Chi-Square	12086,023
Bartlett's test of sphericity Df	990
Bartlett's test of sphericity Sig.	.000

Secondly, the reproduced matrix contains the differences between the observed correlation coefficients and the ones predicted from the model. 50% of these values should be smaller than .05. In the data it was found that 13% has residuals that are greater than .05, which is below 50% and therefore no reason for concern. Finally the determinant was .0001608 which is more than the necessary value of .00001.

Ten factors were identified, explaining a total of 69,715% of the variance. The average communalities between all factors was $30\ 673/45 = .681$. Kaiser's (1974) guidelines were followed in the decision how many factors to extract. Since the average communalities was above .600, Kaiser's criterion can be used. Ten factors

makes sense because based on the literature review and the number of scales, this number was expected (6 scales for the perceived quality of HR practices, affective organizational commitment, continuance commitment, job performance and a preference for early retirement). The scree plot can be found below.

Graph 6.1: Scree plot of the whole survey



The reliability of factor analysis depends on the sample size and the number of variables. In this study there were 6 independent variables and 4 dependent variables. It has been argued that one needs between 5 to 10 participants per variable (Kass & Tinsley, 1979) up to 300 beyond which test parameters tend to be stable regardless of the participant to variable ratio (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Many researchers have argued that having a sample size of 300 cases is sufficient for factor analysis (Comray & Lee, 1992; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), so a sample size of 414 cases allowed me to confidently perform a factor analysis.

To discriminate between factors, factor rotation has been used. There are two types of rotation: orthogonal rotation and oblique rotation. An oblique rotation should only be used if there are good reasons to suppose that the underlying factors could be related in theoretical terms (Field, 2009). Since there are no good reasons to suppose this, orthogonal rotation was used. There are three methods of orthogonal rotation: varimax, quartimax and equamax. It has been argued that varimax is a good general approach that simplifies the interpretation of factors (Field, 2009). In line with Field’s recommendation, varimax was used in this study.

6.5.2 Factor analysis of the perceived quality of HR practices scale

For the perceived quality of HR practices scale, factor analysis was conducted separately. The KMO statistic gave a value of .913. Also, the researcher looked at the

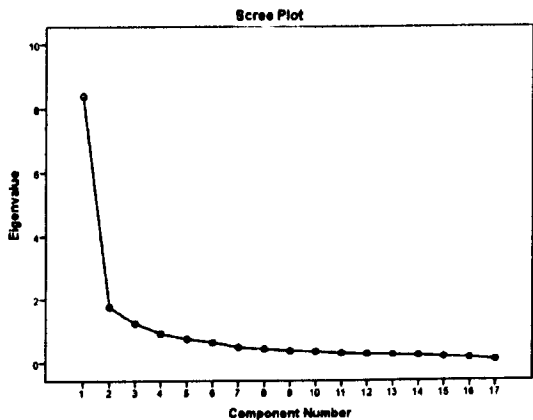
diagonal line of the anti-image correlation matrix and since all values were above .500, ranging from .830 to .958, so none of the items were excluded based on this analysis. Finally, Bartlett’s test is significant. The outcomes of the KMO statistic are also displayed.

Table 6.14: KMO statistics and Bartlett’s test of the perceived quality of HR practices scale

KMO of sampling adequacy	.913
Approximate Chi-Square	4965,373
Bartlett’s test of sphericity Df	136
Bartlett’s test of sphericity Sig.	.000

The correlation between the different items of the perceived quality of HR practices scale ranged between .200 and .898. The determinant of the correlation between the different items of the perceived quality of HR practices is .0004956 which is greater than the required value of .00001. Therefore multicollinearity is not a problem. In order to determine the number of factors that are extracted Kaiser (1974) has set some criteria. However, I decided to look at the scree plot and the inflexion of the curve. A first inflexion can be observed after 3 factors which was also the number of factors obtained using Kaiser’s criterion, while another smaller drop is visible after 6 factors. Based on the literature review and the fact that these scales have been used before, it was decided to go for 6 factors.

Graph 6.2: Scree plot perceived quality of HR practices scale



6.6 Statistical analysis

It was decided to use multiple regression. Although structural equation modeling allows for measurement error, provides confirmatory factor analyses and regression coefficients simultaneously, including causal paths that are not directly related to the dependent variable, these (possible) new causal paths were beyond the scope of this study. Multiple regression does not allow for modeling measurement error and has only causal pathways from independent to dependent variables, and only at one level (Field, 2009). Second order latent variables are impossible to model. However, these characteristics fit the theoretical model of this thesis. The first reason not to have used structural equation modelling is that this thesis tests a simply model with three straight relationships. A second argument relates the subject to item ratio. It has been argued that one needs a subject to item ratio of at least 5 to 1 (Hatcher, 1994), although higher ratios are better and often required. Nunnally (1967) has developed a rule of thumb that one needs a subject to item ratio of 10 to 1. This ratio is widely used (Osborne & Costello, 2004). Since the survey had 67 items, the sample size needs to be $10 \times 67 = 670$. Since only 414 fully filled out surveys were obtained, structural equation modeling was considered inappropriate also for this reason.

One can choose between hierarchical regression, where the most important predictors based on previous studies are entered into the model first; forced entry, where all predictors are forced into the model simultaneously and stepwise methods where the order in which predictors are entered into the model are based on a mathematical criterion (Field, 2009). Researchers have argued that stepwise methods should be avoided since the mathematical criteria are done with a computer that often use random sampling variation that is based on slight differences in semi-partial correlations (Wright, 1997). However, it might be that these small statistical differences are not in line with the theoretical importance of a predictor in a model. The choice between hierarchical regression and forced entry depends on what the literature suggests. If much is known about the importance of certain predictors, hierarchical regression is the best option, while forced entry is preferably otherwise (Field, 2009). In the present study forced entry was used for the reason explained above.

The sample size needed depends on the size of the effect one is trying to detect and with how much statistical power one wants to detect these effects (Field, 2009). Miles and Shevlin (2001) have produced some graphs that illustrate the sample size needed to achieve different levels of power, effect sizes and predictors.

An effect size is a measure that describes the magnitude of the difference between two groups. This study has 6 predictors. Taking an effect size of .8, what Cohen (1988) considered a high level of power, a medium-effect would be detected with a sample size of 90 with 6 predictors and a small-effect would be detected with a sample size of over 600. Since this study has a sample size of 414, medium effect sizes will be detected with an effect size of .8. However, small effect sizes may or may not be detected.

6.7 No control group

This study only used employees aged 45 or older. No younger employees were included in this study. It was chosen not to include younger employees, since research has shown that they are not thinking about retirement (Lim, 2003; Twenge, 2010). Similarly, a recent study in the Netherlands (Visser, Oosterveld & Kloosterboer, 2012) showed that people under the age of 45 are not thinking about their retirement yet and that their attitude towards this as well as their ability to say anything about which factors would influence their decision would therefore not make sense. This study was conducted by TNS-NIPO and used a sample that was representative of the working population in the Netherlands. However, for the other dependent variables more information of previous studies of younger versus older employees in the Netherlands would be helpful. In order to be able to position the present study, it was chosen to present some findings of previous studies regarding the perception of the quality of HR practices, job performance, affective and continuance organizational commitment and to compare the results.

First of all the perception of the quality of HR practices is briefly discussed, although this is not a dependent variable. The participants in the present study had an average score of 2,59 on the scale measuring the perception of the quality of HR practices on a scale from 1 to 5. This means that they rated the quality between “quite bad” and “neutral”. This perception is more negative than the perception of HR practices measured in a study conducted by Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe (2011) in two large organizations in the Netherlands. The participants in their study were aged 16 to 66, with an average age of 39 and their average score on the perceived HR practices scale was 3,31 on a scale from 1 to 5. The HR practices in this study were training/development, participation/autonomy/job design, performance appraisal/rewards, teamwork/autonomy, work–life balance, recruitment/selection and employment security. The difference might lie in the lower

occupational status in the present study. It might be that they have less access to HR practices and therefore a more negative perception.

Secondly, a comparison with the national survey on working conditions in the Netherlands has been used to compare the results regarding the variable job performance with the results from a study that includes employees aged 15 to 64. This study that took place in 2008 (Koppers, De Vroome, Mol, Janssen & Van den Bossche, 2009). Participants were asked to compare their own job performance with the performance of other employees in a similar function. They had to rate how they thought their supervisor would rate their performance, which is a meta-perspective like in this study. This measure was adapted from a questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization (Kessler et al., 2003). This study found that employees consider that their job performance is better than average (38%), as good as others (59%) or worse than others (3%). In relation to age, it seemed that people aged 25-54 are more positive about their job performance than people aged 55-64 (Koppers, De Vroome, Mol, Janssen & Van den Bossche, 2009). This thesis found an average score of 3,15 on a scale from 1 to 5. 15% of the participants rated their job performance below expectations, 52% as expected and 33% above expectations. When we compare the two studies we can see that in the present study that only included older employees, people seemed to have a more negative perception on their job performance compared to the national survey including people aged 15-64. This could have been expected based on the finding that older people seem to be to less positive about their performance (Koppers et al., 2009), it is therefore in line with previous studies.

Finally, regarding affective organizational commitment, this thesis found a positive relationship between perceived HR practices and affective organizational commitment ($r=.46$; $p<.01$). In a study conducted in two large organizations in the Netherlands (Boon et al., 2011) a similar correlation was found ($r=.44$; $p<.01$). This study looked at employees aged 16 to 66 with an average age of 39. This indicates that this relationship might be similar for older and younger employees.

Regarding continuance organizational commitment, another study looked at 334 employees aged 20-76 in the Netherlands and found support that when employees age, continuance commitment becomes more prevalent (Ball, de Lange, Zacher & Van der Heijden, 2013). Based on this study, it is likely that a sample of younger employees would show lower levels of continuance commitment, compared to this thesis with a sample of only older employees where continuance commitment

is likely to be more prevalent in line with Ball, de Lange, Zacher & Van der Heijden (2013).

6.8 Use of SPSS

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software is mostly used in the social sciences and in many studies in scientific journals. It is also very user-friendly. Having a background in psychology, the researcher was already familiar with the software.

6.9 Preference for early retirement

Regarding the expected and preferred retirement age, the average preferred retirement age in the present study is 61.39 years (standard deviation 3.27, range 45-81 years) and the average expected retirement age is 65.01 years (standard deviation 2.36, range 55-81 years). People want to retire on average 3.64 years before they think they can realistically retire. The range went from 0 (no preference for early retirement, the wanted and expected retirement are equal) to 25 (wanting to retire 25 years earlier than the age at which one expects to retire). The preference for early retirement variable was entered in the regression model as the number of years at which one want to retire earlier than they expect to do.

The difference between the expected and preferred retirement age was tested with a one-sample t-test and it was found that the difference was statistically significant as can be found in the tables below.

Table 6.15: Descriptive statistics preference for early retirement

	Mean	SD	Standard error of the mean
Expected retirement age	65.01	2.375	.117
Wanted retirement age	61.39	3.279	.162

Table 6.16: One-sample t-test for preference for early retirement, 99% confidence interval.

	T	Degrees of freedom	Significance (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Lower	Upper
Expected retirement age	554.281	409	.000	65.012	64.71	65.32
Wanted retirement age	378.107	407	.000	61.382	60.96	61.80

6.10 Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression was used with perceived quality of HR practices as independent variables and job performance, affective and continuance organizational commitment and the preference for early retirement as dependent variables. The multiple regression analysis can be found in tables 6.17, 6.18, 6.19 and 6.20.

Each table presents the independent variables and one dependent variable.

Standardized coefficients are used, the standardized regression coefficient Beta is given, the t value and the significance as well as the R^2 adjusted and the F value.

Table 6.17: Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable preference for early retirement. Standardized coefficients.

		Beta	T	Significance
Constant			8.782	.000
Flexible work options		.044	.733	.464
Job design		-.019	-.237	.813
Training		-.089	-1.175	.241
Performance evaluation		-.087	-1.153	.250
Recognition and respect		.015	.204	.838
R^2 adj.	.012			
F value	1.56			

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the perceived quality of HR practices would hold a negative relationship with a preference for early retirement. In other words, it was expected that the more positive the perception of the quality of HR practices, the weaker the preference to retire early. However, in contrast with this expectation, perceived quality of HR practices does not predict a preference for early retirement.

Table 6.18: Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable job performance. Standardized coefficients.

		Beta	T	Significance
Constant			28.923	.000
Flexible work options		.115	2.117	.081
Job design		-.039	-.550	.582
Training		.041	.578	.563
Performance evaluation		.051	.731	.465
Recognition and respect		.281	4.226	.000**
R^2 adj.	.133			
F value	13.51			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive relationship between the perception of the quality of all HR practices and job performance, so that a more positive perception of the

quality of HR practices would have a positive influence on job performance. The results show that not all perceived HR practices have a significant relationship with job performance. Only the HR practices related to recognition and respect ($\beta = .281$, $p < .001$) were significantly related to job performance. The beta indicates the strength of the relationship between the predictor and outcome variable. Hypothesis 2 can therefore partially be supported.

Table 6.19: Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable affective organizational commitment. Standardized coefficients.

		Beta	T	Significance
Constant			28.923	.000
Flexible work options		-.020	-.385	.700
Job design		.269	4.025	.000**
Training		-.060	-.916	.360
Performance evaluation		.075	1.142	.254
Recognition and respect		.291	4.697	.000**
R ² adj.	.253			
F value	27.800			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 6.20: Multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable preference for continuance organizational commitment. Standardized coefficients.

		Beta	T	Significance
Constant			33.514	.000
Flexible work options		-.007	-.122	.903
Job design		-.106	-1.376	.170
Training		.047	.612	.541
Performance evaluation		.073	.966	.334
Recognition and respect		-.055	-.767	.443
R ² adj.	-.001			
F value	.744			

Hypothesis 3a predicted that perceived quality of HR practices would hold a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment. In line with the predictions, the results show that the HR practices job design ($\beta = .269$, $p < .001$) and recognition and respect ($\beta = .291$, $p < .001$) significantly predict the outcome. Also hypothesis 3b expected to find a non-significant relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and continuance organizational commitment. In line with this hypothesis the results show that perceived quality of HR practices does not predict continuance organizational commitment.

Based on the model presented at the beginning of chapter 6, the final model is depicted below. We can see that both job design and recognition and respect are positively related to affective organizational commitment, while only recognition and respect showed a positive relationship with job performance:

Figure 6.2: Outcomes of the quantitative study of this thesis

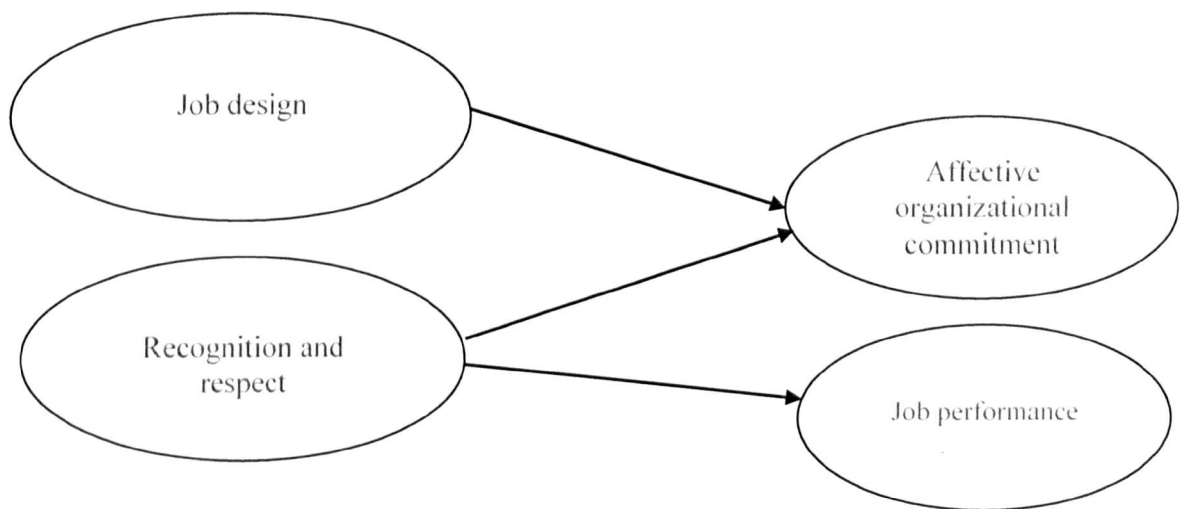


Table 6.21: Overview with hypotheses with their outcome (rejected/supported).

Hypothesis	Hypothesis	Outcome	Detailed outcome
1	HR practices have a negative relationship with the preference for early retirement	Rejected	All HR practices were unrelated to the preference for early retirement
2	HR practices have a positive relationship with job performance	Partially supported	Only recognition and respect showed a positive relationship with job performance
3a	HR practices have a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment	Partially supported	Only job design and recognition and respect showed a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment
3b	HR practices are unrelated to continuance organizational commitment	Supported	All HR practices were unrelated to continuance organizational commitment

6.11 Conclusion

To summarize, we hypothesized that perceived quality of some HR practices would have a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment and job performance, a negative relationship with a preference for early retirement and no relationship with continuance organizational commitment.

The results of the study show that perceived quality of HR practices does not influence a preference for early retirement. The hypothesis should therefore be

rejected. The hypothesis that perceived quality of HR practices is positively linked to job performance can be partially confirmed, since only the HR practices related to recognition and respect were significant predictors regarding job performance. Furthermore, we hypothesized that perceived quality of HR practices would be positively related to affective organizational commitment. This hypothesis can be partially confirmed, since only the HR practices related to job design and recognition and respect had a significant positive relationship with affective organizational commitment.

The implications of these results will be discussed in the following chapter, the discussion and conclusion.

Chapter 7: Discussion & Conclusion

Given an ageing workforce in most European countries, this study draws upon social exchange theory and a mixed methods approach to explore the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and a range of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes amongst average low occupational status workers in the creative industry in the Netherlands. This provided an opportunity to address a number of issues: the value of mixed methods in exploring these issues, the explanatory strength of social exchange theory in helping understand these relationships; and how these matters have been manifested in a particular national and industry context.

As an aid to the reader, this chapter of the thesis restates the research problem and gives an overview of the methodology. Then, the contributions and advances to the existing body of knowledge will be discussed. The major sections of this chapter summarize and explain the results of both the qualitative and the quantitative study. The findings will be compared with the findings of previous research and theoretical explanations will be presented. Moreover, the theoretical and methodological implications are discussed and conclusions about the research problem will be drawn. Finally, the limitations of the study are outlined and directions for future research are presented.

7.1.1 Problem statement

This study examined the role of perceived quality of HR practices on affective and continuance organizational commitment, job performance and the preference for early retirement among older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands. The HR practices under study are flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation, and recognition and respect.

7.1.2 Overview of the methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach, in which both quantitative and qualitative elements are used in order to increase the overall strength of the study.

The first study was qualitative in nature and used thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews by telephone with employees age 45 or above working in the creative industry in the Netherlands. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and

content analysis was used to identify what issues older employees face at the workplace, which HR practices to use in the quantitative study and what factors influence their retirement decision. The outcomes of this first qualitative study were in line with the literature review.

The second study was quantitative in nature and used surveys to target the same population as in the qualitative part of this study. A mix of several existing scales was used, except for the scale measuring perceived quality of HR practices that was designed by the researcher. All other instruments have been used in previous research, ensuring good methodological characteristics with alphas above .70. A pre-test was conducted, the survey was adapted and the final survey was sent out by post. A total of 414 fully filled out surveys were sent back to the researcher. The data were entered in the statistical software program SPSS and multiple regression was used to analyze the data. The results of this study provided little support for the proposed hypotheses. Especially the insignificant relationship between the perception of the quality of HR practices and the preference for early retirement was unexpected.

After the unexpected outcomes of this quantitative study, the researcher went back to the results of the qualitative study and conducted a second round of analysis, using hermeneutics in order to look for explanations of the unexpected findings. After this new round of analysis it was found that although older employees want organizations to make adaptations to the workplace, the provision of HR practices for older employees is perceived as a negative stamp that they belong to a devalued social group. Also, it became clear that other factors, apart from HR practices, were more important in the retirement decision. So the discrepancy between the findings of the qualitative and quantitative study seem strange on the surface, but make sense when allowing for the opposing and contradictory findings of the interviewees.

7.1.3 Contributions and advances to existing body of knowledge

This study contributes to the existing body of research in several ways.

First, the quantitative study has found that the social exchange theory can not explain the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and the preference for early retirement. Based on the qualitative study, it seemed that the social identity theory better explains this relationship. This puts forward the questions how the social exchange theory applies to older employees with an average low occupational status.

Secondly, it was found in the qualitative study that on the individual level finances and health were important in the decision whether to retire early or not, while on the organizational level flexibility, communication and a mentality change towards older workers were identified as factors influencing this decision. The average low occupational might be the reason of this finding as will be discussed in more detail below.

Thirdly, this study shows the strength of mixed methods. The exploratory qualitative study was used to design the survey, but when the results of the quantitative study were not as expected it was decided to get back to the qualitative data and to conduct another round of analysis, which led to explanations of the unexpected results. In other words, without the use of a mixed methods design, the researcher would have been unable to explain the results.

The table below outlines the theoretical and empirical contributions of this study in a summarized way.

Table 7.1: Overview theoretical and empirical contributions

Nature	Contribution
Theoretical	The social exchange theory has been successfully applied to older employees in previous studies. However, this theory could not explain the finding that perceived quality of HR practices is unrelated to a preference for early retirement and only shows weak correlations with job performance and affective organizational commitment. It seems that the « interest » dimension of the social exchange theory that relates to the nature of the exchange partner's involvement in the exchange process plays a role, since the provision of the HR practices was seen as something that was offered to them by the organization on a stand-alone manner, without a caring attitude and without a real interest in them. This also calls for more research on the process model of social exchange, compared to the content model.
Theoretical	The insignificant relationship between the perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement can be explained by the social identity theory. It was found in the qualitative study that the provision of HR practices for older employees were perceived as a stamp that they now belonged to a socially devalued group which none of them desired.
Empirical	Although companies are using HR practices as a tool to influence the retirement decision of older employees by trying to keep them longer into the workforce, this study found that the perception of the quality of all HR practices in this study were unrelated to a preference for early retirement in a sample of older employees with an average low occupational status. This finding is in contradiction with previous studies that focused older employees with a high occupational status

	(managers).
Empirical	In line with previous studies, this study found that the personal factors health and finances have a strong influence on the retirement decision. However, this study extends previous research by identifying organizational factors that influence this decision among older employees with an average low occupational status that work in a heavily changing and physically strenuous industry. The three factors identified were: flexibility, communication and a negative mentality towards older employees.

In order to give an overview of the advances and contributions of the present study, a table will be presented below explaining to what extent previous research has studied the themes investigated in this study.

Table 7.2: Extent to which previous research has studied the themes investigated in the present study.

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Has been studied...</u>
Being an older employee	To some extent
Perceived quality of HR practices-preference early retirement	Only very limited
Perceived quality of HR practices-commitment	Extensively
Perceived quality of HR practices-job performance	Extensively
Factors influencing retirement decision	To some extent

As can be seen in the table above, the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices on the one hand and commitment and job performance on the other hand have been studied extensively in previous studies. The relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement has received little attention from researchers so far. These issues have been raised only to a small extent, with little empirical testing. The findings of this study related to these themes can be considered contributions to the existing body of knowledge.

7.1.4 Summary of the results

The results of this study suggest that a positive perception of the quality of some HR practices among older employees in the creative industry in the Netherlands tends to co-exist with an increase in job performance and affective organizational commitment, which is in line with the social exchange theory. However, in contrast with what was expected, no positive relationship was found between perceived quality of HR practices and the preference for early retirement. The social identity

seemed to be able to explain this finding. The retirement decision is influenced more strongly by finances and health as well as a mentality change towards older employees, more flexibility and more open and regular communication.

7.2 Discussion of the results

The discussion of the results will be structured by hypothesis/research issue. Reference will be made to chapter three to show how the findings fit into the existing body of knowledge. Also, different theories and concepts will be used to explain the findings which have been briefly explained in chapter three.

7.2.1 Research issue 1

The first theme that was discussed in the qualitative study was about how it is to be an older employee nowadays, which relates to the first research issue of the qualitative study. This research issue will be discussed on three levels: the societal level, the organizational level and the individual level.

On the societal level it was found that negative stereotypes and age discrimination are highly prevalent. The interviewees in the present study mentioned that their social identity as “older employee with a low occupational status” led to many age-related stereotypes both in their organization as in society as a whole. Many interviewees recognized that they are treated in a disadvantaged way because of their age, which is in accordance with previous studies (Pasupathi & Lockenhoff, 2002; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2000). In line with the social identity theory, the identification with this social group has indeed the predicted negative consequences like stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination (Turner et al., 1987). Individuals have multiple selves or identities dependent on the context (Jenkins, 2004) and this identification as a member of a certain social group influences their behavior or attitudes (Korte, 2007). Social identity theory assumes that the status relations between social groups are often unequal, and that social groups are in competition with each other for status and power (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By adopting the social identity “older employee”, individuals need to keep a positive self-image and thus need to deal with issues like negative stereotypes and age discrimination. As was found in previous studies (Grima, 2011), the way the interviewees dealt with the negative stereotypes and the age discrimination they were subjected to was highly heterogeneous. Although some people felt powerless and let it happen to them, others felt they had to prove constantly that the negative stereotypes were incorrect.

This is tiring, asks a lot of energy and made them feel they do not just have to perform well, but should outperform younger employees.

On the organizational level the interviewees stated that they often have the impression that organizations want to get rid of them because they are more expensive than their younger counterparts. Moreover, they have the impression that organizations stop investing in older employees quickly, because they think that investing in younger employees will give a higher return on investment. The human capital theory can be used as an explanation for this finding. The human capital theory states that an organization can invest in human capital in order to increase the employability of employees. With time, human capital depreciates automatically. However, organizations can take measures to compensate for this depreciation, by providing training for example (Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000). The human capital theory also predicts that human capital investments are lower for older employees than for their younger colleagues. This is because the time horizon is shorter. In other words, the period to recuperate the costs of such investments is shorter, leading to a lower return on investment (Neumann & Weiss, 1995). Organizations see thus only the costs of older employees, with few ways to make them more productive, motivated or make them perform better. As a result they prefer younger employees who are lacking experience, but are more productive and less expensive than older employees and will give a higher return on investment if the organization decides to invest in them. Moreover, the interviewees mentioned that their knowledge is often seen as obsolete, especially in the rapidly changing creative industry where they have to adapt and learn new technologies constantly. However, some interviewees mentioned that they enjoy it when their (tacit) knowledge gets recognized as being valuable and difficult to replace. Sharing this knowledge with others was also a wish of many interviewees. The interviewees explained that they would appreciate to transfer their knowledge to younger employees and occupy more mentoring and coaching roles.

On the individual level it became apparent that based on the negative stereotypes about older employees and the changing nature of the creative industry in the Netherlands, interviewees were afraid of skill obsolesces and were scared not to be able to keep up with the current (especially technological) developments. This feeling is not ungrounded, since it was recently found that older employees who use a PC at work have a higher probability of remaining employed in the future (Biagi, Cavapozzi & Miniaci, 2013). As a consequence, some older employees left the

creative industry or started a business on their own in order to avoid problems. This escaping behavior is related to the existing negative stereotypes about older employees. Buyens Van Dijk, Dewilde and De Vos (2009) introduced the concept of stereotype threat in which older employees are scared to confirm the negative stereotypes people hold about older employees and avoid as a consequence those tasks that society expects them to fail at (Steele & Davies, 2003). This also changed their attitude towards work in the sense that they have become less ambitious and also less willing to learn new things. This is in line with previous research that showed that older employees are looking for a job or position that best utilizes their existing skills, gives them a positive work experience and reinforces their positive identity instead of a job in which they will have to develop themselves and acquire additional skills (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Warr, 2001).

7.2.2 Research issue 2 and hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 and research issue 2 tried to get more insights in the relationship between HR practices as perceived by older employees and their preference for early retirement. In fact, governments and organizations are increasingly interested in identifying those factors that might incite older employees to retire later. Up till recently, governments and organizations have focused on the financial and legal aspects related to the retirement decision by making early retirement financially less attractive and increasing the legal retirement age (Gruber & Wise, 2002). HR practices are a tool that can be used in order to improve the labor participation of older employees and make them want to increase the age at which they wish to retire. It was expected that perceived quality of HR practices would hold a negative relationship with the preference for early retirement, so that a more positive perception of the quality of HR practices would co-exist with a weak preference for early retirement, which would be in line with the social exchange theory (Allen et al., 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The social exchange theory would expect older employees to reciprocate actions on the side of the organization by expressing behaviors favorable to the organization, like a preference to stay in the workforce. However, it was found that the perceived quality of HR practices is unrelated to a preference for early retirement.

7.2.3 Research issue 4 and hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 expected to find a positive relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and job performance, based on the social exchange theory. This study found a positive relationship only between the perception of the quality of HR practices related to recognition and respect and job performance.

That recognition and respect have a positive influence on job performance has also been shown in previous studies (Davies, 2001; Vlachos, 2008). The recognition of one's experience, knowledge, skill and expertise, ensuring that one is treated with respect by others in the organization and showing appreciation for a job well done are important to employees of all age groups, including older employees (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). It has been argued that older employees react strongly to internal motivators like recognition and respect as opposed to external motivators like a promotion or a salary increase. This could explain why a positive perception related to recognition and respect tends to be positively related to job performance, while HR practices related to flexible work options, training, performance appraisal and job design do not show such a relationship.

7.2.4 Research issue 3 and hypotheses 3a and 3b

This study distinguished between affective and continuance organizational commitment. In line with hypothesis 3a and 3b it was expected that all HR practices under study would hold a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment and would be unrelated to continuance organizational commitment. The idea behind these expectations lies in the social exchange theory that suggest that the provision of HR practices is seen as a way of the organization to show its commitment and support (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Setton et al., 1996; Allen et al., 2003) and in turn leads to favorable behaviours in the form of commitment to the organization on the side of the employee. The hypotheses that perceived quality of HR practices would hold a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment and would be unrelated to continuance organizational commitment can be partially supported by the results. This study found a positive relationship between the perception of the quality of HR practices related to job design and recognition and respect on the one hand and affective organizational commitment on the other hand. Perceived quality of HR practices was, as predicted, unrelated to continuance organizational commitment. The qualitative study showed that the interviewees will not give their 100% if there is no interest from the side of the organization. They

state that if the organization does not listen to them and gives them the impression that they do not care about what they have to say, they become fully disengaged in return, while being valued, trusted and empowered (freedom over how to execute a task for example) had a positive influence on their commitment, which is in line with previous studies (Allen et al., 2003; Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Kuvaas, 2006; Watson & Papamarcos, 2002). Moreover, several interviewees have mentioned that their commitment towards the organization has changed from emotional to continuance commitment as a result of a change in the perception of the quality of HR practices. A mismatch between the wishes of the older employee and the HR practices provided or insufficient communication and listening on the side of the organization has led older employees to continue working out of necessity and not because they felt emotionally attached to the organization.

7.2.5 Research issue 5

The last research issue that the qualitative study of this thesis examined is the identification of the different factors that influence the retirement decision. The overall theoretical framework of this study is the social exchange theory. This theory states that there is a social relationship between the organization and its employees in which both give and take. As such, employees who have a positive perception of their employment relationship with the organization might want to react to the organization by extending their working life. In other words, the social exchange theory would expect a negative relationship between certain organizational factors and a preference for early retirement. However, in contrast with the expectation of this theory, the present study found that finances and health were the main factors influencing this decision on a personal level, while a mentality change towards older workers, flexibility and communication were identified on the organizational level.

Flexibility was found to be one of the three core concepts regarding the organizational factors that influence the retirement decision. Flexibility is a broad concept that goes beyond the organizational context. Flexibility does not only refer to flexible working options, but also includes flexibility to balance work and family. It was found that employees in organizations that do not provide enough flexibility for older employees to balance work and home often are more incited to retire early. If an organization fails to offer enough flexibility, the present study found that older employees consider volunteering work as an alternative to paid employment. They

explained that being able to contribute to society, make a difference and be useful are needs that can be fulfilled by doing volunteering work which might in some cases be more important than being in paid employment. Another issue related to the concept of flexibility is the notion of choice. The older employees in the present study explained that the simple fact that the retirement decision is a personal choice or a necessity influences this decision, so that a feeling of choice delays retirement. As such, one can argue that by increasing older employees' choice of retirement options, an organization might be able to make them extend their working lives.

Communication was a second core concept found in the present study. Open and regular communication with employees may affirm their perception of the organization's readiness to provide any possible assistance if needed. As such, it is a form of organizational support that has been found to be negatively related to a preference for early retirement (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

The last core concept distilled from the qualitative study of this thesis is about a mentality change regarding older employees. As was presented previously, there are many negative stereotypes about older employees at the workplace and they also perceive age discrimination. It was found that older employees that experienced age discrimination had a strong preference for early retirement and the continuous feeling that the employees had to prove that the negative stereotypes about them were incorrect was found to be tiring.

7.3 Explanations for the obtained findings

The following part will present explanations for the findings in this study.

First, the way the constructs were used will be discussed: the content versus the process model of social exchange theory will be explained, the use of a meta-perspective to measure job performance will be discussed, the fact that no distinction was made between the two components of continuance commitment will be presented, the perception of employees versus managers will be looked at in more detail as well as perceived versus actual HR practices.

Then, the effect of sample, older employees with an average low occupational status, will be discussed in more detail. More precisely, their occupational status will be examined, the social identity theory will be discussed, perceived organizational justice will be presented as well as work centrality, continuity theory and the socio-emotional selectivity theory.

Finally, the effects of the context will be taken into account. Organizational support, perceived HR strength, psychological contract violation and the national culture will be aspects that will be looked at in more detail.

7.3.1 Effect of the way constructs were used: social exchange theory

The non-significant relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement could be explained by the fact that it focused on the content model of the social exchange relationship and not the process model. The content model focuses on the content of what is exchanged between employee(s) and employers (Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen & Tetrick, 2009). HR practices fit in this content model. As previous researchers have argued, exchange relationships are more complex than the resources exchanged (Shore et al., 2009). Process models assume an ongoing and interdependent exchange in which both parties make contributions in a non-sequential manner that reflects the tenor of the relationship (Shore et al., 2009). In other words, the way the older employees in the present study perceive their social exchange relationship with their organization does not depend on the resources exchanged, like their perception of the quality of HR practices, but on other less tangible variables.

7.3.2 Effect of the way constructs were used: job performance

Job performance refers to how well each employee performed the duties of his/her job (Ibrahim, Al Sejini & Al Qassimi, 2004). This thesis has used a meta-perspective of job performance in order to decrease the socially desirability bias that is present in self-rated job performance. Since it was impossible to obtain actual figures of job performance from the employers, this study has asked respondents to rate their supervisor's assessment of their performance. Schoorman and Mayer (2008) have argued that one should ask respondents for their supervisor's assessment of their performance rather than for their own assessment in order to overcome the socially desirability bias, without asking for actual figures of job performance of the organization. However, this way of measuring job performance has not been used very much before, presenting the risk that this biases the findings.

7.3.3 Effect of the way constructs were used: continuance commitment

Although research has shown that continuance commitment exists of the two components perceived unavailability of alternatives and perceived personal costs

(Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe, & Stinglhamber, 2005), this study has not made this distinction. It is possible that the fact that this study did not distinguish between the two has influenced the non-significant relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and continuance commitment in the present study, since it has been suggested that HR practices have a positive relationship with continuance commitment (McElroy, 2001; Meyer & Allen, 1997), arguing that employees perceive the loss of valuable HR practices as costly thereby enhancing this type of commitment.

7.3.4 Effect of the way constructs were used: employee's perspective

Secondly, this thesis looks at perceived quality of HR practices as perceived by *employees*. Very few studies have collected data directly from the employees (Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayto, & Swart, 2005), while it has been argued that employees are the preferred source when it comes to perceived HR practices (Wright & Boswell, 2002). However, as argued by Purcell and Hutchinson (2007), the way employees perceive the quality of HR practices depends on the way they are delivered by managers. This thesis does not look at managers, but acknowledges that that not doing so might influence the findings.

7.3.5 Effect of the way constructs were used: perceived versus actual HR practices

The non-significant relationship between some HR practices and job performance can be explained by the fact that this study examined *perceived* HR practices and not the *actual* HR practices an organization has in place. Many researchers have revealed that there is a difference between the perception of HR practices and the objective existence of these practices (Wright & Nishii, 2007). First of all, many employees are unaware of the existence of certain HR practices (Allen et al., 2003) resulting in more negative outcomes measuring perceived HR practices compared to actual HR practices. In other words, when an employee perceives that a certain HR practice is absent, this HR practice will receive a low score on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good) on the survey used in this study. Insufficient knowledge about the availability of HR practices leads to a negative perception, although this is incorrect since the HR practice does exist but is probably not properly communicated so that employees are not aware of it. Also, a perception is subjective and personal, and influenced by many individual, psychological and environmental factors. Therefore,

individuals perceive the same HR practices in different ways at different times. It is likely that the same individuals will hold a slightly different perception of the same HR practices in a different economical climate for example.

7.4.1 Effect of the sample: occupational status

Previous studies have focused mostly on older employees with a high occupational status (Armstrong-Stassen & Templer, 2005; Mantzana, Themistocleous & Morabito, 2010). Most of them looked at the perception of managers (Gibson & Barron, 2003; Herrbach, Mignonac, Vandenberghe & Negrini, 2009; Thun, Grossler & Miczka, 2007). However, it has been argued that not taking into account the perception of employees with a lower occupational status is likely to lead to skewed findings (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Lau & Ngo, 2004, Truss, 2001). Indeed, the average low occupational status of the employees under study has influenced the findings. First of all, the average low occupational status of the employees is likely to influence their preference for early retirement, since blue-collar workers are occupied with different factors in their lives than white-collar workers or employees with a higher occupational status (Pillay, Kelly & Tones, 2010). Previous research has shown that for employees with a high occupational status being challenged and valued are the main drivers that prevent them from retiring (Millward & Brooke, 2007). For employees with a lower occupational status, being in good health and earning a decent income were mentioned as factors that would make them extend their working lives (Millward & Brooke, 2007). In addition, many older employees in the present study had repetitive jobs that were mentally and/or physically strenuous, leading to increased health risks.

Moreover, this also explains why job design was found to have a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment, although this is in contrast with a study that focused on a sample of older manager (Herrbach et al., 2009). This can be explained by the fact that this study measured 'job design', which is broader than what Herrbach, et al., (2009) called 'new roles'. Job design indeed contains new roles, but includes more aspects of job design, like career planning, challenging assignments and the possibility to transfer to a less strenuous job. It might be that the positive relationship found is due to one of the other items related to job design. Especially in the light of the average low occupational status of the older employees under study, it is likely that the possibility to transfer to a less strenuous job is an appealing item to these employees. In addition, in the qualitative study, older

employees have emphasized the need for different positions that are mentally and physically less challenging.

It has also been argued that older employees with a low occupational status have fewer opportunities to change employer, and will therefore feel committed toward their existing organization irrespective of these HR practices (Ng & Feldman, 2008). This can be explained by the cognitive dissonance theory. Cognitive dissonance is a feeling of discomfort caused by two inconsistent cognitions that can be solved by either changing one's behavior to bring it in line with the dissonant cognition or justifying one's behavior through changing or adding a dissonant cognition. In other words, older employees have little opportunities to change employer, but this is not in line with their positive identity of being an employee with plenty of opportunities. This leads to a feeling of discomfort and is solved by changing the attitude towards the organization. By feeling committed to the organization, older employees turn their stay at the current organization into a choice instead of a necessity as the result of a lack of alternatives. Also, they might feel that no matter how they feel about their organization, they will not get a better or higher position and as such they will not increase their job performance, because it is unlikely that the organization will reciprocate by giving a valuable inducement in return.

The average low occupational status of the interviewees under study can explain the importance of finances and health-related issues in their decision to retire. Since low occupational status employees earn on average less than people in higher categories (Van Rossum, van de Mheen, Mackenbach & Grobbee, 2000), it is not surprising that finances influences strongly their retirement decision, this was also found when the "average high occupational status group of interviewees" and the "average low occupational status group of interviewees" were compared in chapter 5. Many interviewees mentioned that they simply need to continue working for financial reasons. Moreover, low occupational status employees often do work that is physically challenging (Statistics Netherlands, 2010). The interviewees explained that they feel they can not do it anymore at a certain age or they will be completely worn-out before they will retire. Indeed, it has been found that jobs requiring heavy physical effort, repetitive tasks, and which make employees tired of working, induce them to plan an early retirement (Beehr et al., 2000; Elovainio et al., 2005). Although a comparison was made between interviewees with a "low occupational status" versus the ones with a "high occupational status", the groups were very small (22

versus 8 interviewees), this comparison is in my opinion not sensible. Although the small differences have been reported in chapter 5, I do recall that more research is needed in order to see if the differences found hold true in previous studies or if they are the result of some coincidence.

7.4.2 Effect of the sample: social identity theory

The interviewees in the qualitative study explained that the provision of HR practices for older employees were perceived as a “stamp” that they belonged to the social group of “older employees” and that this was seen as something negative. As such, the provision of HR practices was not seen as a form of organizational support as would be expected based on social exchange theory, but was perceived as a stamp that they were now an “older employee”. Desmettes and Gaillard (2008) showed that from the moment employees are categorized as “older workers”, individuals become potential targets for prejudice and discrimination related to ageing. The interviewees of the qualitative study confirmed this since many older employees do not wish to be seen as older employees. They explained that this social group is stigmatized and that there exist many negative stereotypes about older employees. The interviewees of this study try to cope with their unwanted membership of this social group by emphasizing their social identities other than being an older employee. They seem to focus on their organizational group, meaning that they identify themselves with individuals who share similar tasks, hierarchical status, or function instead of their age-mates.

The non-significant relationship between the perception of several HR practices and affective organizational commitment can also be explained by this theory. According to the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the adoption of a certain identity can lead to stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination (Turner et al., 1987). The provision of HR practices designed for older employees might not be as welcome as is commonly assumed, since it emphasizes their identity as ‘older employee’. They prefer to be offered the same HR practices as younger employees in order to emphasize their similarities and not their special needs and wishes. Furthermore, for some interviewees their negative perception of the quality of HR practices designed for older employees was a reason to either start their own business or leave the creative industry and start working in a completely different sector. Older employees might perceive these HR practices as a ‘stamp’ that they are old and need special attention, reinforcing the existing negative stereotypes about this

social group. One negative stereotype about older employees concerns their lower job performance in comparison with younger employees. When older employees internalize these stereotypes and start behaving in accordance with them, it might result in a self-fulfilling prophecy and the stereotype becomes reality. This principle has been confirmed in several studies (Abrams et al., 2006; Buyens, Van Dijk, Dewilde & De Vos, 2009; Nelson, 2002; Taylor & Walker, 1998). The results of the qualitative study support this explanation, since it appeared that a change in mindset and the related negative stereotypes about the assumed abilities and capacities of older employees is needed in order to perform well. On the other hand however, older employees might deal with their stigmatized identity by behaving in a counter-stereotypical way. In other words, they will do everything to outperform younger employees, thus increasing their job performance. The different background of the interviewees and the psychological processes related to their social identity make that it is likely that some older employees show an increase in job performance when they get older, while it decreases for others.

7.4.3 Effect of the sample: perceived organizational justice

Another explanation why this study failed to find a significant positive relationship between several HR practices on the one hand and affective organizational commitment and job performance on the other hand concern the role of organizational justice. A perception of fairness has been shown to be extremely important at the workplace and positively influences organizational commitment (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Chai-Amonphaisal & Ussahawanitchakit, 2008; Chang, 2002; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Kumar, Bakhshi & Rani, 2009) and job performance (Chai-Amonphaisal & Ussahawanitchakit, 2008; Colquitt et al., 2001). Thus not how positive or negative the perception of the quality of HR practices is counts, but how *fair* they are perceived might be what truly influences organizational commitment.

7.4.4 Effect of the sample: work centrality

Another possible explanation for the non-significant relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement concerns the fact that the present study did not measure work centrality. Work centrality refers to the overall importance of work in a person's life (Paullay et al., 1994). It has been argued that work centrality may be especially relevant to older employees

(Armstrong-Stassen, 2008), since it seems to have a positive relationship with age (Harpaz, 2002). Work centrality can also be associated with the social identity theory, since someone who scores high on work centrality has a social identity that is closely linked to his or her occupation or organization. This social identity at work is important and will stimulate the employee to continue working since he or she will otherwise be deprived from his or her important social identity. This idea has been confirmed by other researchers who found that work centrality is a strong predictor of the desire to continue working (Harpaz, 2002) and therefore tend to plan to retire later in life (Adams, Prescher, Beehr, & Lepisto, 2002; Schmidt & Lee, 2008).

Role theory applied to retirement emphasizes that the transition involves role loss, redefinition, and change. Indeed, a person involved in the retirement process undergoes important role transitions (Riley & Riley, 1994). On the one hand, retirement may lead to a loss or a weakening of roles connected with work, while it might strengthen familial or societal roles at the same time (Barnes-Farrell, 2003). According to Ashforth (2001), being involved in a particular role at work is important for one's identity, and it affects behaviors and decisions. The importance of this identity, or their work-role attachment might influence the retirement decision (Carter & Cook, 1995). If an employee's role has been central to someone's identity this loss may produce negative psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and stress (Carter & Cook, 1995). On the contrast, employees dissatisfied with their work-roles or employees with many satisfying roles outside the workplace may be keen to retire (Adams et al., 2002).

7.4.5 Effect of the sample: continuance theory

The qualitative study showed that personal factors predict the desire to extent the working life more strongly than factors that are related to the organization, like affective organizational commitment. Continuance theory (Atchley, 1989) can explain this. An employee that has a specific hobby and a low level of commitment is more likely to choose to retire to be able to exercise his hobby and keep this sense of continuity in an activity that is important to him/her. While an employee high on commitment and with a high level of work centrality will keep a sense of continuity by continuing to work. This theory states that a sense of continuity is important for older employees. Older employees try to keep routines, habits and structures when they get older (Finchum & Weber 2000; Kim & Feldman 2000). One can find a sense of continuity by extending employment and retiring later which would mean

that this theory would predict a negative relationship with a preference for early retirement. However, a sense of continuity can also be obtained by being able to spend more time exercising a hobby, being with family and friends or other activities or ways to spend time that strengthen their social identities that are important to them. Since the qualitative study showed that personal factors are important in the retirement decision of older employees in the present study, it is possible that they value their social identities outside the workplace. These other social identities will give them a sense of continuity and will increase their preference for early retirement.

7.4.6 Effect of the sample: socio-emotional selectivity theory

That recognition and respect have a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment has been found in previous studies (Allen et al., 2003; Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Chew & Chan, 2008; McEvoy & Blahna, 2001; Rau & Adams, 2005). It has even been suggested that feelings of recognition are especially important to older employees, since they have stronger social needs and focus on emotionally meaningful social interactions. This idea can be explained by the socio-emotional selectivity theory, a life-span theory of motivation (Carstensen, 1993). The socio-emotional selectivity theory states that with age, employees increasingly focus on what is most important to them: social interactions with people they know well and with whom they have rewarding relationships. Feeling valued and recognized by those individuals are thus important to them and give them positive emotional experiences, which is exactly what they are looking for. Since the time horizon for older employees is shorter as a result of retirement getting closer, older employees value investments that will pay off quickly or will lead to a positive experience immediately and not in the future, as would be the case for an investment in personal development like training for example. In other words, the changes in time perspective related to one's age influence the shift in focus of older employees. Indeed, it has been found by previous researchers that as one ages, certain HR practices become less important in the enhancement of affective commitment (Bal et al., 2008, Kooij et al., 2009).

7.4.7 Effect of the sample: HR practices perceived as a form favoritism

The negative relationship between the perception of the quality of flexible work options and affective organizational commitment is in line with a study by Herrbach,

Mignonac, Vandenberghe and Negrini (2009). They suggested that flexible work options are often offered in the form of individual arrangements, instead of in the form of a collective measure. As a result, this can be perceived by the employee in question and/or his or her colleagues as favoritism. Indeed, a perception of favoritism might lead to an increase in negative feelings and attitudes like jealousy that will have a negative influence on affective organizational commitment (Rousseau, 2005).

7.5.1 Effect of the context: perceived organizational support

Perceived organizational support has been found to mediate the relationships under study in some previous studies (Armstrong & Ursel, 2009; Chen, Lin, Lu & Tsao, 2007; Kuvaas, 2008). Perceived organizational support has been defined as an employee's general belief concerning the level of care and attention given by the company and the way in which it values his or her contributions (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson & Sowa, 1986). The provision of HR practices can be seen as a form of organizational support, leading to positive attitudes and behaviors. Perceived organizational support has been found to have positive relationships with the intention to remain in the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), affective organizational commitment (Tremblay & Roger, 2004) and job performance (Kuvaas, 2008). Indeed, according to the norm of reciprocity, one way employees react to their positive perception of organizational support is by remaining in the organization (Allen et al., 2003), expressing higher levels of affective organizational commitment (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002) or perform better (Chen, Lin, Lu & Tsao, 2007). However, a proper match is necessary for older employees to perceive the provision of HR practices as support from the organization. So perceived organizational support might only mediate the relationship between perceived HR practices and the retirement decision if the HR practices and the older employee for whom the HR practices are designed for are properly matched. A good match between the needs, wishes, skills, knowledge, experience, tasks and responsibilities of older employees on the one hand and the HR practices offered on the other hand is necessary in order to ensure HR practices have its desired effects on the attitudes and behaviors of older employees (Chew & Chan, 2008; Warr, 2001). This could explain both the non-significant relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement as well as the non-significant relationship between the perceived quality of several HR practices and affective organizational commitment. Researchers have argued that older employees prefer to

continue executing the tasks they have always done, since this gives them the most positive work experience (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). They feel most strongly affectively committed to organizations that ask them to use their already acquired skills, knowledge and abilities instead of offering them to learn new ones (Kristof, 1996; Withers, 2001). As a result, older employees who are offered training to learn new skills do not perceive this as positive, because it does not match the interests or skills of the employee, missing its positive effect on organizational commitment or the retirement decision.

7.5.2 Effect of the context: perceived HR strength

HR strength at the organizational level, defined as the extent to which management and individuals share the same perceptions of the quality of HR practices, was found to have a positive effect on the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and employee commitment. The more consistent the perception of the quality of HR practices between managers and employees, the greater the employee commitment to the organization (Chen, Lin, Lu & Tsao, 2007). It might be that the perception of the quality of HR practices of the managers and the older employees in this study is not at all similar and therefore influences the findings.

7.5.3 Effect of the context: psychological contract violation

Psychological contract is related to the social exchange theory and can be defined as a person's perception and expectations about the shared duty in an employment exchange relationship (Rousseau, 1990). Psychological contracts define the terms of the social exchange relationship (Blau, 1964) that exists between individuals and their organizations. Literature suggests that employees seek to maintain equity between the costs and benefits of such relationships (Adams, 1965). Thus, employees who experience psychological contract violations will, in turn, decrease the contributions that they make to their organizations, which could explain that the perception of the quality of HR practices does not show a positive relationship with affective organizational commitment. Psychological contract breach captures employees' perceptions of the extent to which the employer has failed to fulfill one or more of its obligations (Conway & Briner, 2005). The psychological contract focuses on how employee's perceptions of the quality of HR practices are affected by whether expectations about these practices have been violated or fulfilled. Met

expectations lead to high affective commitment and violated expectations are expected to lead to low continuance and affective commitment.

7.5.4 Effect of the context: national culture

Culture might also influence the findings, since work ethic depends heavily on culture (Gahan & Abeysekera, 2009). The work ethic in the Netherlands is orthodox, meaning that employees perceive it as normal to give their full potential regardless how they feel about the organization. This was also found in the qualitative study. The interviewees mentioned that they considered it normal to give 100 percent, simply because they got paid for what they do. The way they feel about their organization does not influence this. It is based on an economic exchange where one gets paid for the work that has been done.

7.6 Limitations

The present study has used a mixed methods design in order to increase its overall strength, but the study also has its shortcomings. These will be discussed below.

First of all, as outlined in chapter two, the context chapter, the sample is Dutch, which has some cultural implications. The national culture in which this study took place influences the findings, making generalization to other countries difficult. Still, I expect that the obtained findings are noteworthy and provide valuable clues for future research and cross-validation in different settings and countries.

A second related limitation of this study is the sector this study focused on. While this gives more insights about this specific occupational group, other categories of employees may have different needs and respond differently to organizational practices. Related to the sector comes the occupational status of the older employees under study. Especially the fact that many jobs in these sectors are repetitive and physically or mentally strenuous might have an influence on the findings by overestimating the importance of some aspects of job design and the importance of health and financial factors related to the retirement decision. However, as was outlined chapter 2 the main problem is that although I want to make a statement about older employees with a low occupational status, more than half of my sample has a rang 3 or 4, belonging to a “high occupational status”. That is why I refer to “average low occupational status” and throughout the thesis and why a comparison between “high” versus “low” occupational status interviewees is made in chapter 5. However, as outlined before, more research here is necessary.

A third limitation is that *perceived* rather than *actual* HR practices were measured. Although it has been argued that it is the perception of HR practices that influences behaviors and attitudes, it is important to study actual HR practices to see if similar findings would be obtained in their relationship with constructs like commitment, job performance and the retirement decision.

A fourth limitation is that this study has only investigated employees' *preference* for early retirement, which is an affective response and not an objective measure. It is important to know if a preference for early retirement, the intention to retirement and the actual retirement decision can be linked to one another and are related in similar ways to the constructs under study and if not, which factors can explain possible differences.

The use of in-depth interviews to probe complex answers may be prone to inaccuracy due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the information sought. To overcome this potential problem and to reduce the reluctance to share the information freely, a semi-structured interview style was selected to elicit the responses and the interviewees' confidentiality was assured. However, this method is never free from biases as was explained in chapter four and is acknowledged as a limitation here.

Furthermore, the use of a convenience sample regarding the qualitative study is an important limitation. For qualitative research other types of sampling are preferred to obtain a sample that has similar characteristics as the whole population under study. However, this type of sampling was not possible here, since I did not have access to sufficient demographic details to be able to construct such a sample.

Another limitation concerns the cross-sectional design where all variables were measured only once. Future research using a longitudinal design is needed to address the issue of causality, and to pay attention to possible changes in retirement preferences over time (Bidewell et al., 2006). Indeed, the cross-sectional design makes conclusions about causality unreliable. Although it is commonly assumed that perceived quality of HR practices lead to an increase in commitment and job performance and decreases the wish to retire early, it is not impossible that the relationship is in the opposite direction. It might well be that organizations provide more HR practices to older employees that are already more committed and it is also plausible that highly committed employees have a more positive perception of the quality of HR practices in comparison of employees who are less committed, while the actual provision of the HR practices is exactly the same.

A last limitation relates to the range of HR practices covered. The choice of HR practices might have affected some of the findings. Other HR practices, like rewards for example, are likely to be related to attitudes and behaviors. So it is important to note that although this study found that the provision of certain HR practices does not necessarily make older employees want to stay longer at the organization, it might well be that other HR practices not taken into account in the present study do influence the retirement decision.

To conclude, the limitations outlined above are acknowledged but they do not detract from the significance of the findings. The limitations of the present study merely provide a platform for future research that will be discussed in the next section.

7.7 Implications for theory

The theoretical framework of this thesis is the social exchange theory. It was expected that this theory would be able to explain the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices on the one hand and commitment, job performance and a preference for early retirement on the other hand in a sample of older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands. Contrary to the expectation, it seemed that this theory can not explain the results. Hereunder, this unexpected finding will be discussed in more detail and will provide its implication for this theory.

The social exchange theory has received a lot of attention from researchers. Previous studies have shown that this theory seems to work in different national cultural contexts (Jones, 2010; Tsui & Wang, 2002; Wang, Tsui, Zhang, & Ma, 2003; Zhang & Jia, 2010). As such, it can be ruled out that the unexpected findings are a result of the Dutch national culture in which the study took place. Another characteristic of the present study is that the sample consisted of older employees. However, the social exchange theory has successfully been applied to older employees in previous studies (Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009; Bal, Jansen, van der Velde, de Lange & Rousseau, 2010; Herrbach et al., 2009), eliminating this option as well.

This study looked at older employees with an *average low occupational status*, which is something that, to my knowledge, other researchers have not looked at regarding the social exchange theory. As a consequence, it might be that this is the determining factor that led to the unexpected findings.

Older employees with an average low occupational status differ from other employees in several aspects that can be understood by the three underlying dimensions that form the basis of different forms of reciprocal relationships, as described by Sahlins (1972). Sahlins identified the dimension “immediacy of returns” that refers to the timing between initial presentation of a good or service and its repayment, ranging from simultaneous to indefinite reciprocation. As Blau (1964) noted, the timing of the return is unspecified in social exchange relationships and since the time span of receiving inducements from the organization is shorter for older employees, the risk that the investment will not be returned increases. Although previous studies have showed that the social exchange theory can be successfully applied to older employees, it might be that older employees with an average low occupational status do not have the same growth and development possibilities, leading to a stronger need get an immediate result. The dimension “immediacy of returns” might thus be more important for employees with an average low occupational status than it is for employees with a higher occupational status. Another dimension known as “equivalence of returns” reflects the extent to which resources exchanged are similar in value. This is unknown in the present study. “Interest,” the third dimension, is “the nature of the exchange partners’ involvement in the exchange process and ranges from self-interest, through mutual interest, to interest in and concern for the other” (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). From the qualitative part of this thesis it can be derived that there is in most cases some mutual interest, although there were strong individual differences. In general, it can be noted that older employees with an average low occupational status feel less recognized and their opinions and ideas are less taken into account, compared to employees higher in the hierarchy. The “interest” dimension might be as a result more towards self-interest, than towards interest in and concern for the other.

Several issues related to the social exchange theory could have led to the unexpected results. It seems that certain conditions are necessary for the norm of reciprocity to operate. One condition is that both employees and the organizations have to *notice* the rewards on the side of the organization or the behaviors on the side of the employees (Blader & Tyler, 2000). If these do not get detected, they will not get credit for it and it will stay unrewarded. In other words, if the employees in this thesis have not *perceived* the HR practices, they won’t perceive this as positive and will not want to repay the organization by expressing higher commitment, job performance or by extending their working lives. This is related to the issue whether

the content of the exchange (that is, inducements provided for contributions given) are recognized and similarly understood by both parties (organization and employees). Previous studies have shown that employees and managers often disagree about what is exchanged (Tekleab & Taylor, 2003), making it possible that this might not be case. This shows the importance of measuring *perceived* HR practices, versus actual HR practices, since it is someone's perception of things that will influence his or her behavior.

Another condition is that the resources exchanged are valued by the recipient (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Employees are motivated to compensate beneficial treatment from the employer by acting in ways valued by the organization. Researchers assume that the inducements offered by the employer, in the form of the provision of HR practices for older employees for example, are valued by those employees and that employee contributions in the form of organizational commitment for example are valued by the employer. What is assumed to be valuable commodities for exchange may not, in reality, be valued or valued enough to prompt the recipient to reciprocate a resource that is valued. This condition might not have been fulfilled in the present study, since the interviewees of the qualitative study explained that the provision of HR practices for older employees were not well-perceived and not valued by the older employees. As a result, their perception of what they received from the organization was not a valued resource not leading the older employees to reciprocate by for example expressing higher commitment, job performance or staying longer in the workforce. What is valued by employees can be linked to occupational status, since it was found that the employees in this study focused strongly on finances and health issues regarding their retirement decision. HR practices were not only seen as a stamp of being seen as a member of a devalued social group (older employees with an average low occupational status), but also did not correspond their needs and wishes at the workplace. The condition that the resources exchanged are valued by the recipient seems therefore to depend on occupational status.

Gouldner (1960) proposed that benefits are more valued when (1) the recipient is in greater need (2) the donor cannot afford (but does) to give the benefit (3) the donor provides the benefit in the absence of a motive of self interest and (4) the donor was not required to give the benefit. Regarding the first issue proposed by Gouldner (1960), since the older employees in the present study conducted physically and mentally challenging jobs, it can be considered that the recipients

were in need of adaptations for example in the form of certain HR practices, although not the ones offered to them or not offered in the way it was offered to them. No information is available on whether the organizations can't afford but give the benefit and if the organizations provide the benefit in the absence of a motive of self-interest. Related to the fourth point, in the light of the increase in age awareness-policies and the compliance with rules related to this, the provision of HR practices for older employees was perceived as 'the new fashion' (citation from an interviewee in the qualitative study). The provision of HR practices was perceived as a stand-alone resource, while a caring attitude and supporting resources were absent. In addition, the nature and magnitude of the resources, the immediacy or delay in the giving of the resources as well as the method by which the resources are given may also influence the value judgment (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007).

To conclude, the theoretical contribution of this thesis is that the low occupational status of the older employees in this study might have an impact on the social exchange theory. Especially the condition that the resources exchanged are valued by the recipient might not be met for this particular group of employees.

7.8 Implications for methodology

This section reflects on the methodology used.

The mixed-methods approach in this study has presented several strengths. First of all, the exploratory qualitative study gave an overview of the issues of older employees with a low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands. Since few studies have been conducted on older employees with an average low occupational status, this allowed the researcher to get a feel for the issues, needs, wishes and problems of this population before the launch of the quantitative survey study. Also, research issue 2, 3 and 4 examined topics that were also tested by the hypotheses. As a consequence, those topics were covered in different ways, examining different facets of the same phenomenon. Overlap was done on purpose, so that complementary insights and more in-depth information were obtained. So while the hypotheses in the quantitative study tested the relationships between perceived quality of HR practices and affective organizational commitment for example, the qualitative study also had a research issue on organizational commitment. This gave possible explanations for the obtained results in the quantitative study, gave additional information and added scope and breadth. The semi-structured nature of the telephone interviews allowed covering topics of interest

of the researcher, while giving enough flexibility to the interviewees to talk about other topics that seemed important to them. Also, the exploratory qualitative study determined which HR practices were presented in the quantitative study, by the use of content analysis. Sequential methods are useful in that it allows a study to only examine those variables that have been shown important to the population under study. Based on the findings of this qualitative study a survey was designed and 414 fully filled-out surveys were analyzed. This allowed testing the model and supporting or rejecting the underlying hypotheses. However, a major unexpected finding appeared: perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement seemed to be unrelated. As a result, the researcher went back to the qualitative study and conducted a second round of analysis, using hermeneutics. This allowed going beyond the superficial meaning of what has been said and looked for underlying ideas, motivations and explanations. This led to the finding that older employees perceive the provision of HR practices for older employees as a stamp that they belong to the social group “older employees with a low occupational status” and need special attention. As such, the mixed methods approach found that the proposed theoretical framework, the social exchange theory, might apply in a slightly different way to a sample of older employees with a low occupational status. Mixed methods allowed the researcher to get an overview of the issues of a certain population, identify which HR practices are most salient to this population, test hypotheses and then gave explanations for the unexpected findings. The iterative nature of the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative study made me go from the qualitative findings back to the quantitative results and back to the qualitative study again. Going up and forth allowed the researcher to examine overlapping and different facets of the phenomena under study, leading to a deeper understanding of these concepts and leading to the theoretical contribution that the social exchange theory can not explain the relationship between perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement, while the social identity can explain this non-significant relationship in a sample that exists of older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands. The findings of both studies were compared and used to give a broader and deeper understanding of the topics under study. For the reasons mentioned above, the mixed-methods approach has been proven useful and the findings of the study would have been very different if a mono-method approach had been used. In this study, both methods are equal, meaning that neither of the methods is dominant. Although mixed methods

present some constraints in terms of time and finances, it also presents a wide variety of advantages over the use of mono-method studies, making mixed methods extremely valuable. The researcher strongly encourages other researchers to use mixed-methods in future studies.

7.9 Suggestions for future research

The present study provides some more insights about the influence of perceived quality of HR practices on affective and continuance organizational commitment, job performance and the preference for early retirement among older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative industry in the Netherlands. However, this study should be seen as a starting point for future research. Additional research should examine to what extent the results of the present study can be generalized to other samples in other industries, countries, age groups and employees with a different occupational status.

A second point for future research concerns the role of possible mediators that has to be explored in future studies. In the discussion section of the results, several theories and factors have been identified that possibly mediate or moderate some of the relationships under study. These variables, like perceived organizational support, work centrality or organizational justice will need to be taken into account in future studies.

Further research is needed in order to address the issue of causality, since the design of the present study does not allow making inferences about causality. Research using multi-wave designs can provide more specific information about the stability and change of factors related to the retirement decision as well as longitudinal studies. One important weakness of the present study is the lack of a control-group which should be studied in future studies.

In addition, the applicability of social exchange theory for older employees with an average low occupational status has to be examined in more depth in order to better understand the importance of the occupational status of an individual.

7.10 Conclusion

This study used a mixed methods approach to examine the influence of the perception of the quality of HR practices on continuance and affective organizational commitment, job performance and a preference for early retirement among older employees with an average low occupational status in the creative study in the

Netherlands using the principles underlying social exchange theory. It was found that perceived quality of HR practices is unrelated to a preference for early retirement and continuance organizational commitment and only shows weak relationships with affective organizational commitment and job performance. The factors that seem to influence the retirement decision of the employees under study were finances and health on the personal level and flexibility, communication and a perceived negative mentality towards older employees on the organizational level. The provision of HR practices for older employees were perceived as undesirable by the population under study, showing that the social identity theory might provide better explanations for the results than the social exchange theory.

Appendix 1: Bibliography

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Appendix 2: Survey used for the quantitative study

Study senior employees in the art-, information- and media-sectors
Employees 45 years of older (senior employee)

This study is about the work experiences of employees aged 45 and older in the arts-, information- and media-sectors. With this study we want to know which facilities and possibilities organizations provide to their "senior/older" employees in order to stay optimally employable. What counts is the way employees experience the developments in their occupation, their tasks and their organizations on a daily basis. This study focuses on the experience and perception of the employee him-/herself.

Survey

A. How do you perceive the quality of the provision of the following possibilities and facilities within the organization where you work?

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: very bad, moderate, neutral, sufficient, very good

A1. Flexible work options

1. The possibility to have flexible working hours (days/hours)
2. The possibility to work a reduced work week (part-time)
3. The possibility to share a full-time job (job-sharing)
4. The possibility to work from home

A2. Job design

1. The provision of challenging and important assignments or special projects
2. The creation of new positions for older employees
3. The possibility to transfer to a less stressful/strenuous job
4. The provision of a career plan

A3. Training/education

1. Training/education for older employees to keep their work-skills up-to-date
2. Training/education for older employees to acquire new skills
3. The provision of new technologies that will help older employees to execute their job.
4. The provision of the same opportunities for older and younger employees to get promoted or to be transferred

A4. Performance evaluation

1. The provision of a fair performance appraisal (free from age bias)
2. Giving feedback to older employees about their functioning
3. Giving feedback after having followed training

A5. Compensation

1. Offering incentives for continued employment.
2. The provision of compensation linked to performance

3. Improving benefits by providing more vacation time and additional time off.
4. The provision of a confident

A6. Recognition and respect

1. Recognizing the knowledge and expertise of older employees.
2. Ensuring that older employees are treated with respect in the organization.
3. Showing appreciation for a job well done.

B. To what extent do you recognize yourself in the following statements about your commitment to the organization?

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: not at all, hardly, neutral, a bit, totally.

1. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
2. I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization (R).
3. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
4. I feel at home at this organization.
5. I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization (R).
6. I am proud to tell others I work for this organization.
7. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
8. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
9. If I would leave the organization it would be difficult to find a new job.
10. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization right now.
11. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.
12. This organization deserves my loyalty
13. I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer (R)
14. Staying with the organization throughout one's career is a good thing.
15. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.
16. One of the reasons why I stay in the organization is that I value loyalty.

C. The following statements are about your commitment to your occupation. To what extent do the statements apply to you?

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: does not apply at all, hardly applies, neutral, applies a bit, totally applies.

1. I do not regret having entered this profession.
2. I am proud to work in this profession.
3. I identify with this profession.
4. I am enthusiastic about this profession.
5. I like being in this profession.
6. This profession is important to my self-image.

D. The following three questions are about how others evaluate your performance at work.

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: far below expectations, below expectations, as expected, above expectations, far above expectations.

- 1. How would your supervisor rate your own performance?
- 2. How would your supervisor's supervisor rate your own performance?
- 3. How would your colleagues rate your own performance?

E. The following statements are about your perception on age discrimination at your workplace. To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: does not apply at all, hardly applies, neutral, applies a bit, totally applies.

- 1. I have never experienced age discrimination at work
- 2. I do not get jobs for which I think I am qualified because of my age
- 3. Colleagues at work treat me less kind because of my age
- 4. My direct boss treats me less kind because of my age.

F. The following two questions are about your intention to keep on working or to retire.

Respondents are asked to fill in an age ("..... age") after each question.

- 1. At what age do you expect you could realistically retire?
- 2. At what age would you like to retire (regardless the law and your financial situation)?

G. The following questions are about your opinion on policy and facilities.

Respondents could answer on a six-points Likert scale: not, hardly, neutral, moderate, good, no works council or personnel representative.

- 1. To what extent the works council has an open attitude towards the bottlenecks of older employees?
- 2. To what extent older employees recognize themselves in the policies of the works council?
- 3. To what extent older employees recognize themselves in the policies of the trade union FNV-KIEM?
- 4. To what extent can the works council influence the policy at their organization?
- 5. To what extent are you knowledgeable about the policies for older employees in the collective labor agreements?
- 6. Which changes would like to observe? Here, participants could tick several possibilities. The possibilities were: change nothing; stop working; do physically less challenging work; experience less stress; stop working shifts; be able to change tasks, transfer knowledge to younger employees; work part-time; and work less hours a day and participate more in training.
- 7. Which facilities are you currently missing in your organization (if any)?
.....

H. Demographic questions respondent

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Gender | man
woman |
| 2. Age | years |
| 3. Nationality | Dutch nationality
Other nationality, please specify.. |
| 4. Private situation | Married/living together/Single |
| 5. Highest obtained diploma | Primary school
Lower general secondary education
Higher general secondary education
Pre-university education
Intermediate vocational education
Higher Vocational Education
University |
| 6. In what sector are you working? | Graphical sector
Advertising
Multimedia/gaming
Publisher
Arts/theatre/events
Other, please specify..... |
| 7. What is the size of the organization? | 1-9 persons
10-49 persons
50-99 persons
100+ persons |
| 8. Do you work fulltime or part time? | Fulltime
Part time |
| 9. Do you work in production or in office? | Production
Office |
| 10. Do you have an executive or managerial position? | Executive
Managerial |
| 11. What is your function? | |
| 12. At what age did you start working? | starting age |
| 13. How long have you been working for your organization? | years |
| 14. How long are you working in your current function? | years |

End of the questionnaire

Thank you so much for filling out this questionnaire. You can return this questionnaire in the return-envelope provided.
Your trade union will make the results of this study public.

Appendix 3: Interview guide semi-structured interviews

Objectives

- to determine HR practices that are important to older employees
- to explore the issues older employees might encounter
- to understand the reasons behind the needs and wishes of older employees
- to gather reflections on their experiences of age discrimination
- to explore commitment of older employees
- to explore job performance among older employees
- to explore their retirement decision in the workplace in detail

Demographic information

- age
- sexe
- educational level
- full-time/part-time

Topic 1: Issues related to older employees nowadays at work

- Question 1: How is it to be an older employee nowadays? Can you tell me something about your experiences at work?
- Aim: this question aimed to break the ice and get people talking. Also, it was aimed to provide an overview of issues/topics/themes related to older employees.

Topic 2: Perceived HR practices

- Question 2: Can you tell me something about the facilities/possibilities for older employees at your organization? Do they have a special policy in place? How do you feel about this? What policies/practices would you appreciate? What exists already?
- Aim: encourage detailed coverage of HR practices/facilities that exist currently at the workplace, facilities that they would like but that are not available and how different ways organizations are dealing with it are perceived and how this relates to behavioural outcomes like their retirement decision, their motivation, their satisfaction, their job performance etc.

Topic 3: Commitment

- Question 3: Can you tell me how you feel towards your organization? Do you feel committed? What is the basis of this commitment? Can you explain?
- Aim: Explore how older employees are committed to their organization. What types of commitments exist and why. Explore if there are any links between how people feel about their organization and behavioural or attitudinal outcomes.

Topic 4: Job performance

- Question 4: Can you tell me something about your performance? How do others perceive your performance? What influences job performance? How is performance related to age?
- Aim: explore the concept of job performance among older employees in depth, understand what influences their performance and how others perceive them.

Topic 5: Perceived age discrimination

- Question 5: Can you tell me something about age discrimination at your workplace? Have you ever experienced any form of age discrimination? Can you explain what has happened? How did you feel about it? How did you react?
- Aim: Explore the perception of age discrimination at the workplace, its forms and how people react to it.

Topic 6: Retirement decision

- Question 6: What factors influence your retirement decision? When would you like to retire? When do you expect to retire? What would make you continue working longer? Can you explain why? What should change?
- Aim: explore which factors influence the retirement decision and how they influence this decision. Understand what people are looking for if they were to continue working longer.

Appendix 4: Frequency counting qualitative study

TOPIC	Pourcentage	Number
Older employees are too expensive	50%	15
Organizational roles of older employees	27%	8
Tacit knowledge and knowledge sharing	23%	7
Fear of not being able to keep up with the current developments	37%	11
Declining ambition	10%	3
Having to prove oneself	17%	5
Resignation	7%	2
Hectic working environment	23%	7
Declining creativity in the creative industry	10%	3
Increasing workload	7%	2
Ambiance at work	37%	11
Working over-hours	50%	15
Hiring procedures	55%	16
Age discrimination at the workplace	50%	15
Positive age discrimination	10%	3
Stereotypes of older employees	13%	4
Theory-reality paradox	17%	5
The existence/absence of a special policy for older employees	87%	26
(Dis)satisfaction with HR practices	37%	11
Shifts	40%	12
Flexible working hours	10%	3
Working from home	47%	14
Working part-time	7%	2
Job transfer	20%	6
Internal job change	20%	6
Challenging assignment/special projects	10%	3
Ergonomic adaptations	13%	4
Training opportunities	100%	30
Eq. opportunities regarding training for older and younger employees	50%	15
Focus of the training	10%	3
Promotion	100%	30
Performance appraisal	90%	27
Feedback	63%	19
Salary	60%	18
Secondary terms of employment	7%	2
Importance of recognition and respect	23%	7
Recognition for knowledge and experience of older employee	20%	6
Commitment towards the occupation	53%	16
Emotional commitment towards the organization	43%	13
Continuance committed	40%	12
Normative commitment	13%	4
Change in commitment	13%	4
Factors influencing organizational commitment	20%	6
Job performance	60%	18
Factors influencing the retirement decision	100%	30
Desire to keep a certain standard of living	20%	6
Necessity	80%	24
Health	93%	28
Being used to the idea to retire at a certain age	33%	10
Contribution made	27%	8
Sense of accomplishment	20%	6
Having something to do	10%	3
Staying sharp and up-to-date	17%	5
Be part of society and meaningful job	20%	6
Contact with colleagues and clients	77%	23
Partners	40%	12
Pleasure	67%	20
Good ambiance	13%	4
Enjoys current situation	80%	24

Recognition and respect	23%	7
Jobs with fewer responsibilities	30%	9
Voluntary character of retirement decision	30%	9
Flexibility	97%	29
Doing something completely different	23%	7
Desire for a focus on experience instead of age	50%	15
Communication	83%	25
Growth possibilities	13%	4

Appendix 5: Old survey used in pre-test

Study senior employees in the art-, information- and media-sectors
Age limit: 45 years

Introduction

This study is about the work experiences of employees aged 45 and older in the arts-, information- and media-sectors. With this study we want to know which facilities and possibilities organizations provide to their “senior/older” employees in order to stay optimally employable. What counts is the way employees experience the developments in their occupation, their tasks and their organizations on a daily basis. This study focuses on the experience and perception of the employee him-/herself.

The survey takes about 15 minutes.

Survey

- A. The following statements are about your perception on age discrimination at your workplace. To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: does not apply at all, hardly applies, neutral, applies a bit, totally applies.

5. I have never experienced age discrimination at work
6. I do not get jobs for which I think I am qualified because of my age
7. Colleagues at work treat me less kind because of my age
8. My direct boss treats me less kind because of my age.

- B. The following questions are about how you perceive the human resource policies and practices at your organization. The questions are about flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation and recognition and respect. To what extent does your organization provide the practices described below.

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: not at all, a bit, neutral, quite a bit, a lot

Flexible work options

5. The possibility to have flexible working hours (days/hours)
6. The possibility to work part-time
7. The possibility to do job-sharing
8. The possibility to work from home

Job design

5. The provision of challenging and important assignments or special projects
6. The creation of new positions for older employees (for example mentors)
7. The possibility to transfer to a less stressful/strenuous job
8. The provision of a career plan

Training

5. Training/education for older employees to keep their work-skills up-to-date
6. Training/education for older employees to acquire new skills
7. The provision of new technologies that will help older employees to execute their job.
8. The provision of the same opportunities for older and younger employees to get promoted or to be transferred

Performance evaluation

4. The provision of a fair performance appraisal (free from age bias)
5. Giving useful feedback to older employees about their functioning
6. Giving feedback after having followed training

Working conditions

5. Offering incentives for continued employment.
6. The provision of compensation linked to performance
7. Improving benefits by providing more vacation time and additional time off.

Recognition and respect

4. Recognizing the knowledge, experience, skills and expertise of older employees.
5. Ensuring that older employees are treated with respect in the organization.
6. Showing appreciation for a job well done.

C. To what extent do you recognize yourself in the following statements about your commitment to the organization?

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: not at all, hardly, neutral, a bit, totally.

17. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
18. I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization (R).
19. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
20. I feel at home at this organization.
21. I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization (R).
22. I am proud to tell others I work for this organization.
23. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
24. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
25. If I would leave the organization it would be difficult to find a new job.
26. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization right now.
27. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.
28. This organization deserves my loyalty
29. I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer (R)
30. Staying with the organization throughout one's career is a good thing.
31. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.
32. One of the reasons why I stay in the organization is that I value loyalty.

D. The following statements are about your commitment to your occupation. To what extent do the statements apply to you?

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: does not apply at all, hardly applies, neutral, applies a bit, totally applies.

7. I do not regret having entered this profession.
8. I am proud to work in this profession.
9. I identify with this profession.
10. I am enthusiastic about this profession.
11. I like being in this profession.
12. This profession is important to my self-image.

E. The following three questions are about how others evaluate your performance at work.

Respondents could answer on a five-points Likert scale: very bad, bad, normal, good, very good.

4. How would your supervisor rate your own performance?
5. How would your supervisor's supervisor rate your own performance?
6. How would your colleagues rate your own performance?

F. The following two questions are about your intention to keep on working or to retire.

Respondents are asked to fill in an age ("..... age") after each question.

3. At what age do you expect you could realistically retire?
4. At what age would you like to retire (regardless the law and your financial situation)?

G. Demographic questions respondent

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 15. Gender | man
woman |
| 16. Age | years |
| 17. Nationality | |
| 18. Private situation | Married/ Not married |
| 19. Highest obtained diploma | Primary school
Lower general secondary education
Higher general secondary education
Pre-university education
Intermediate vocational education
Higher Vocational Education
University |

- | | |
|---|--|
| 20. In what sector are you working? | Graphical sector
Advertising
Multimedia/gaming
Publisher
Arts/theatre/events
Other, please specify..... |
| 21. What is the size of the organization? | 1-9 persons
10-49 persons
50-99 persons
100+ persons |
| 22. Do you work fulltime or part time? | Fulltime
Part time |
| 23. Do you work in production or in office? | Production
Office |
| 24. Do you have an executive or managerial position? | Executive
Managerial |
| 25. What is your function? | |
| 26. At what age did you start working? | |
| 27. How long have you been working for your organization? | years |
| 28. How long are you working in your current function? | years |

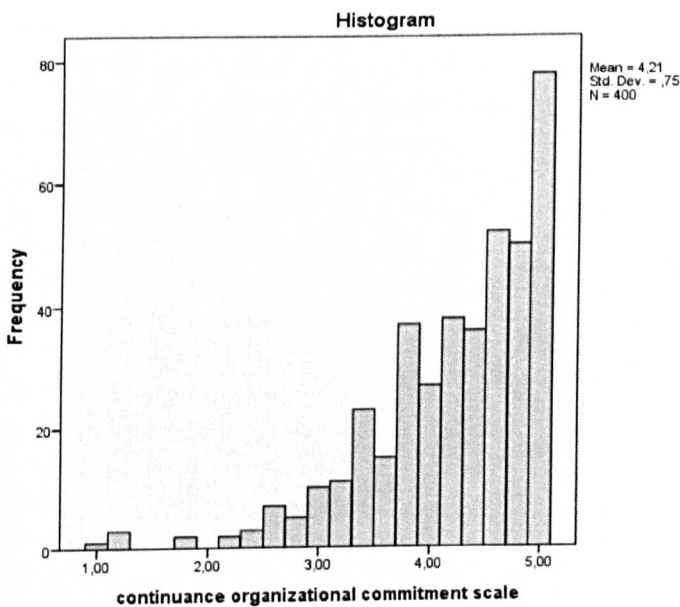
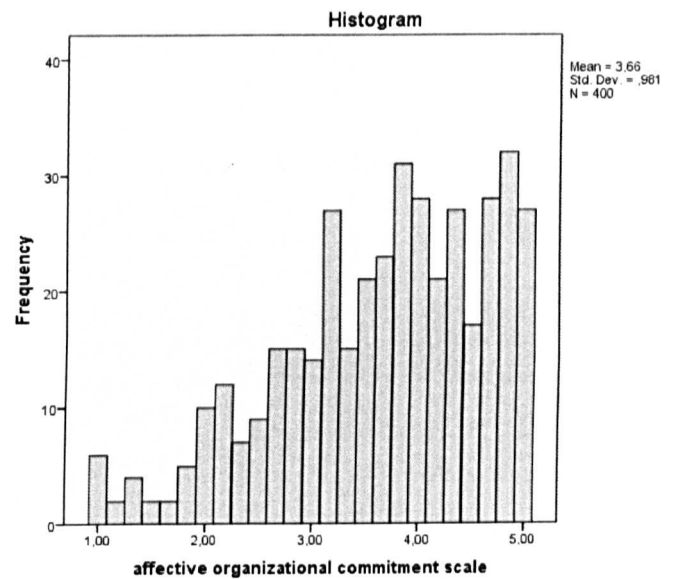
End of the questionnaire

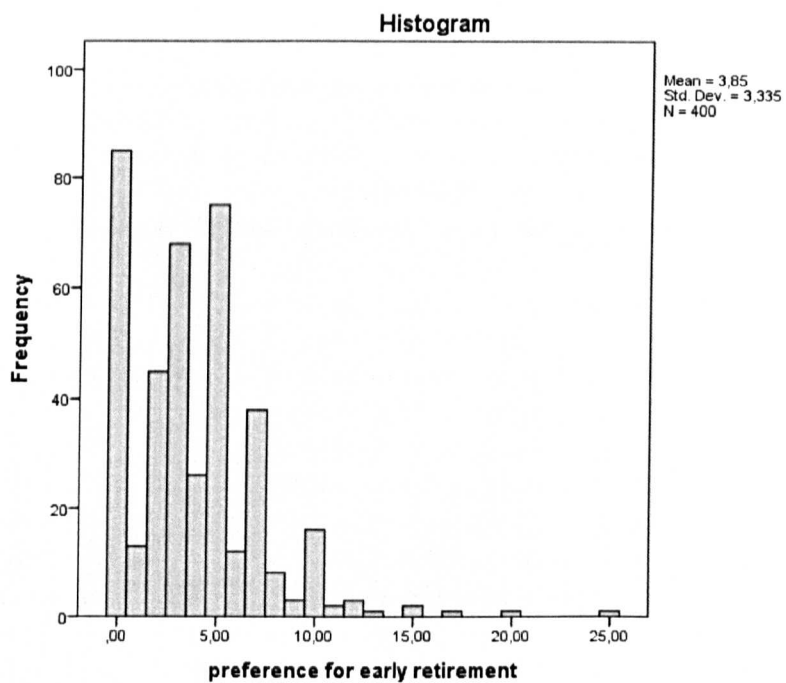
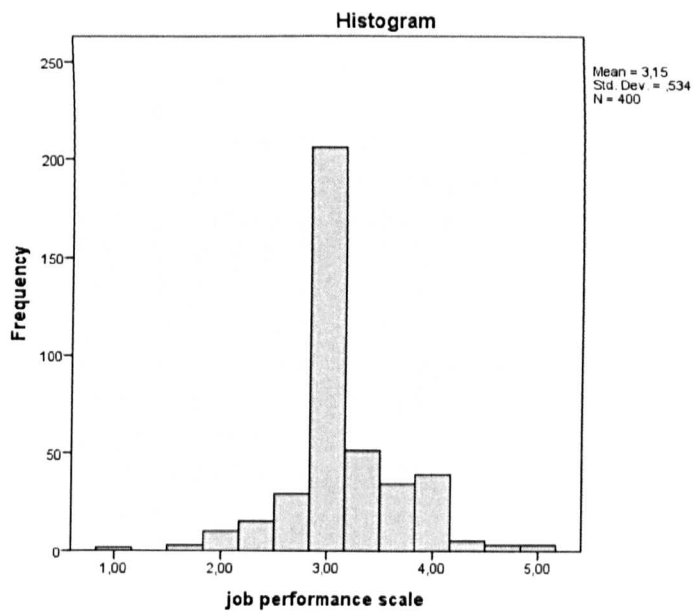
Thank you so much for filling out this questionnaire. You can return this questionnaire in the return-envelope provided.
Your trade union will make the results of this study public.

Appendix 6: Missing data

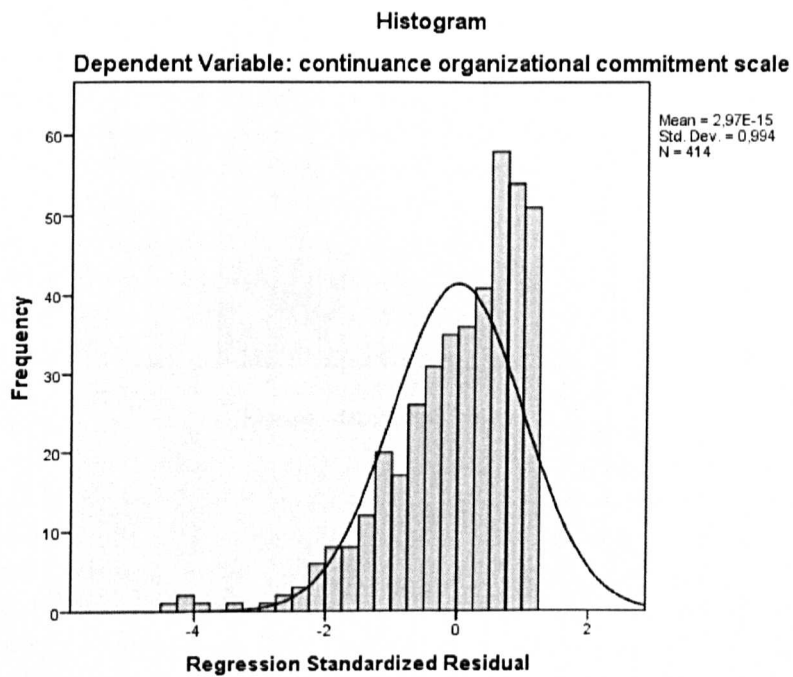
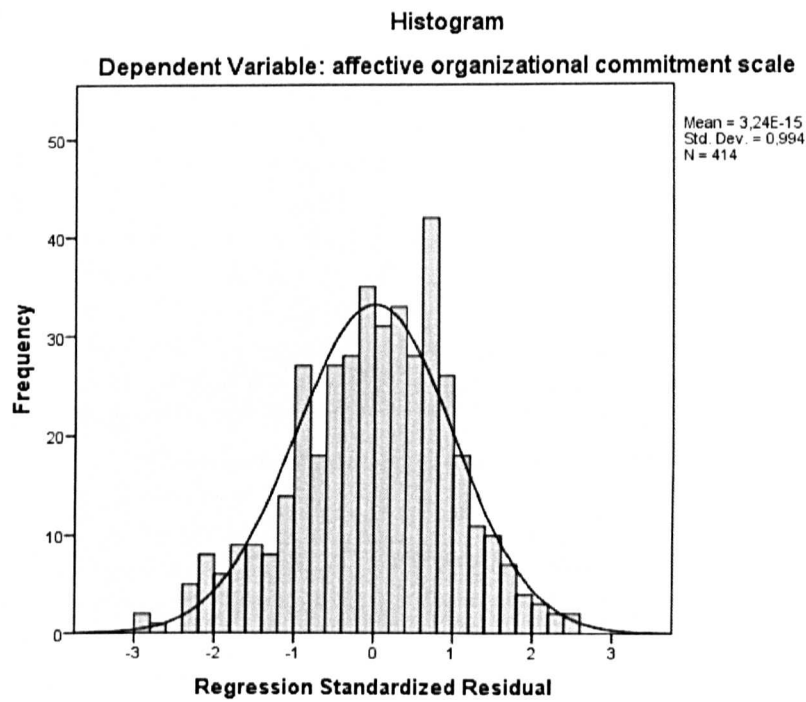
Question	About	Number of missing data	Dealt with by...
A1.1	Flexible work options	3	Replacement of average score
A1.2	Flexible work options	8	Replacement of average score
A1.3	Flexible work options	8	Replacement of average score
A1.4	Flexible work options	8	Replacement of average score
A2.1	Job design	7	Replacement of average score
A2.2	Job design	7	Replacement of average score
A2.3	Job design	7	Replacement of average score
A2.4	Job design	7	Replacement of average score
A3.1	Training	7	Replacement of average score
A3.2	Training	7	Replacement of average score
A3.3	Training	7	Replacement of average score
A3.4	Training	8	Replacement of average score
A4.1	Performance evaluation	3	Replacement of average score
A4.2	Performance evaluation	6	Replacement of average score
A4.3	Performance evaluation	9	Replacement of average score
A6.1	Recognition and respect	4	Replacement of average score
A6.2	Recognition and respect	3	Replacement of average score
A6.3	Recognition and respect	4	Replacement of average score
B1	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B2	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B3	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B4	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B5	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B6	Organizational commitment	6	Replacement of average score
B7	Organizational commitment	4	Replacement of average score
B8	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B9	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B10	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B11	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B12	Organizational commitment	6	Replacement of average score
B13	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B14	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B15	Organizational commitment	5	Replacement of average score
B16	Organizational commitment	6	Replacement of average score
D1	Job performance	3	Replacement of average score
D2	Job performance	3	Replacement of average score
D3	Job performance	3	Replacement of average score
F1	Expected retirement age	10	Replacement of average score
F2	Wanted retirement age	10	Replacement of average score

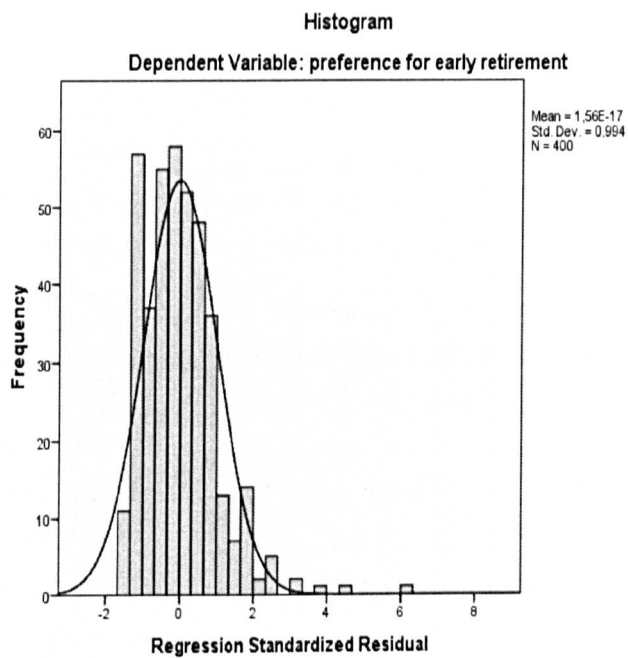
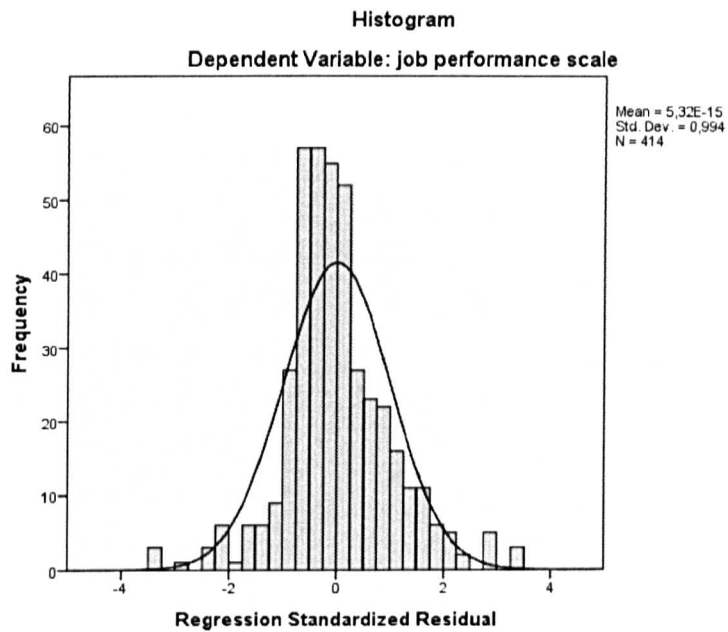
Appendix 7: Histograms to determine normality of data



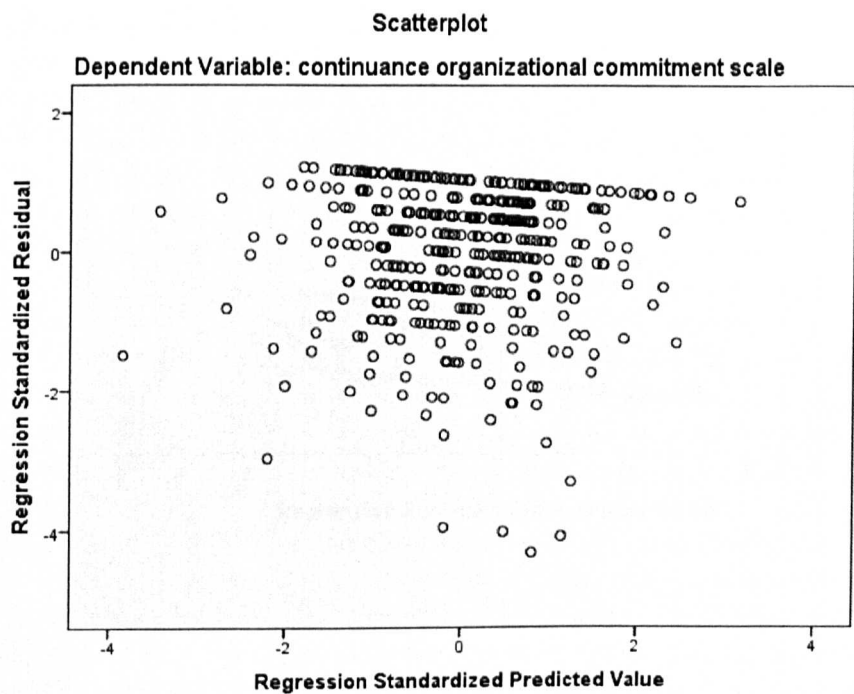
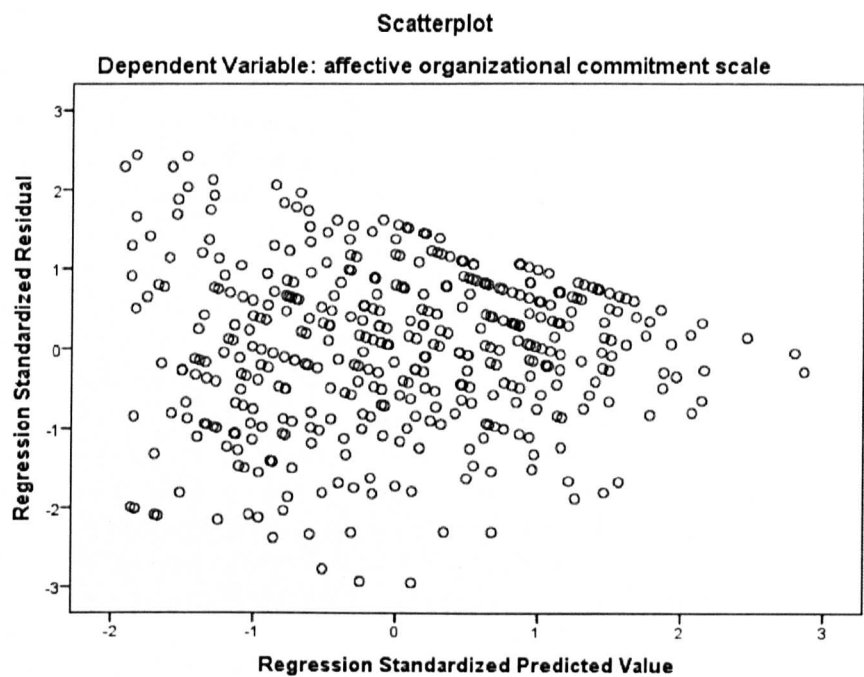


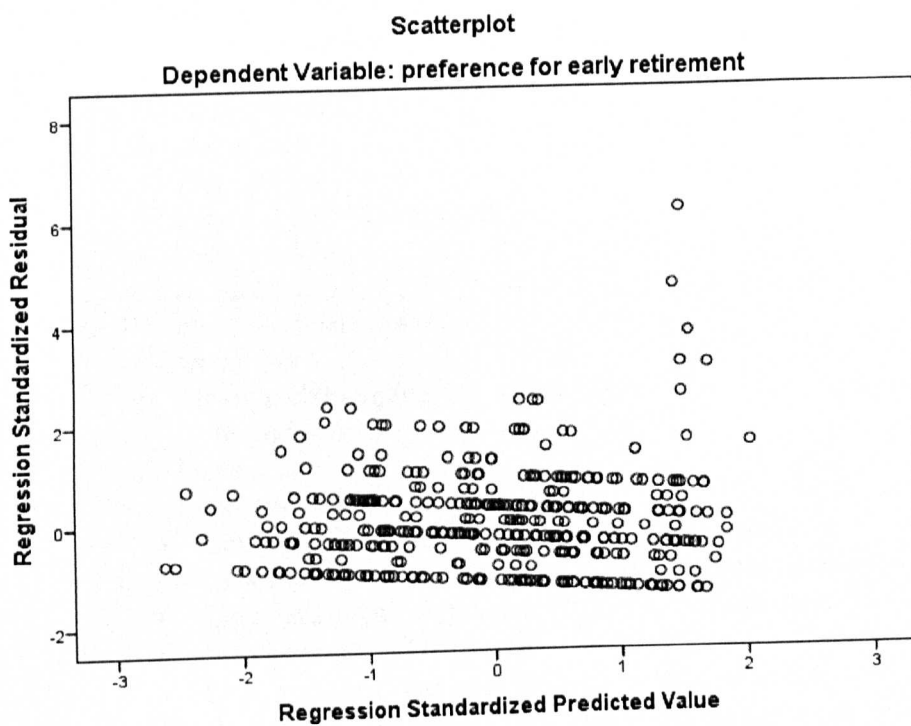
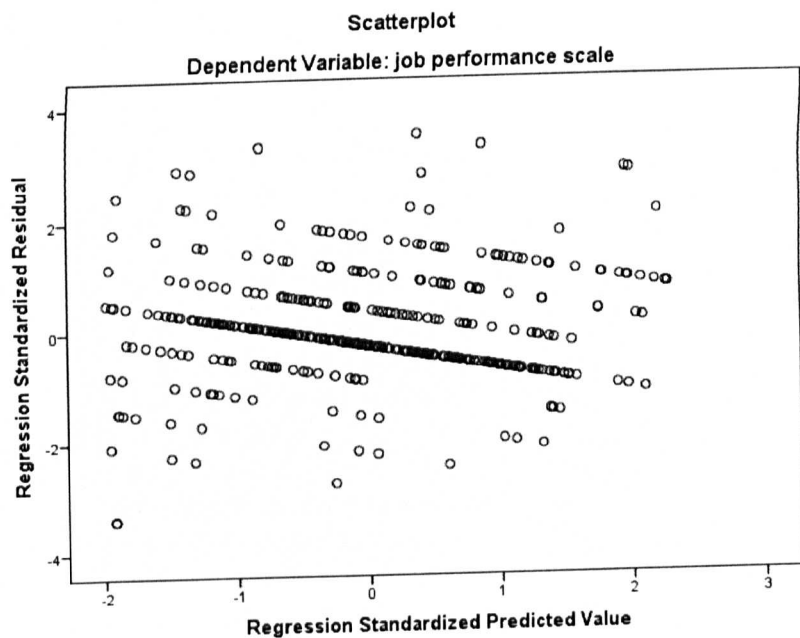
Appendix 8 : Histograms to determine normality of errors





Appendix 9: Scatterplots to determine linearity





Appendix 10: Codebook qualitative study

- Demographic information
 - Sexe
 - Age
 - Educational level
 - Full-time parttime
 - Being an older employee
 - Perceived HR practices
 - Flexible work options
 - Job design
 - Training
 - Performance evaluation
 - Compensation
 - Recognition and respect
 - Ambiance at work
 - Increasing workload
 - Organizational commitment
 - Occupational commitment
 - Perceived age discrimination
 - Retirement age
 - Factors that influence the retirement decision
 - Financial factors
 - Health factors
 - Social factors
 - Pleasure/joy
 - Personal development factors
 - Teamwork
 - Respect
 - Quality of performance
 - Creativity
 - Flexible/challenging job, autonomy
 - Communication
 - Have a say
 - Stay up-to-date
 - Link perceived HR practices to job performance
 - Link perception HR practices to organizational commitment
 - Link perceived HR practices to retirement decision
 - Link perception HR practices to motivation
 - Link organizational commitment to retirement decision
 - Working longer and unemployment older employees simultaneously
 - Success
 - Mentality difference between older and younger employees
 - Career

Appendix 11: Example of hermeneutics

As an example of how hermeneutics were used I will use recognition and respect. Recognition and respect was identified in the literature as an important HR practice for older employees. The exploratory qualitative study confirmed this and three HR practices related to recognition and respect were therefore put in the survey (recognizing the knowledge, experience, skills and expertise of older employees; ensuring that older employees are treated with respect in the organization; showing appreciation for a job well done). However, after the statistical analysis it was found that the HR practices related to recognition and respect had a positive relationship with job performance and affective organizational commitment, while it turned out to be unrelated to a preference for early retirement. When I conducted a second round of analysis of the qualitative study using hermeneutics, research issue five aimed to identify those factors that influence the retirement decision. Since hermeneutics has been called the art of interpretation and allows for complexity and ambiguity taking into account the context and language of the interviewees, this same concept of recognition and respect appeared again but in a different way. It was explained that, in line with previous studies, HR practices related to this are indeed important, like the following excerpt shows:

I think that when you get recognized and the ambiance at work is good, you stay in the workforce. As soon as you get the impression that you don't get recognized anymore, that younger employees do not take you seriously anymore, that you start consider retiring if it's financially possible. I think if an organization sends a signal to older employees by stimulating and respecting them, that people do extend their working life.

However, the interviewees also gave an explanation for the unexpected finding that perceived quality of HR practices and a preference for early retirement were unrelated, while a negative relationship was expected based on the social exchange theory and previous research. Hermeneutics allowed me to identify the contradictions, leading to a deeper understanding. The interviewees explained that although they wanted HR practices related to recognition and respect, they wanted to be treated no differently from employees of other ages. The following quote from an interviewee illustrates this:

I wouldn't call myself a senior employee, I'm just like anyone else. I do not identify with other old people, I identify with my colleagues, with people having the same job or working in the same organization. Old is bad, it means that you're slow, outdated, uninteresting, I don't know. I don't want be offered some facilities because of my age, I mean, as if I have special needs! No, I don't, of course not, just treat me the same way.

In other words, the HR practices should be provided in a way that they are accessible to everyone and are not designed for a particular group of employees. If they are provided to only one group of employees, this is perceived as a stamp that this group has specific needs and need special attention. Here the research diary came in handy, since during the interviews I had made a theoretical note where I had written down all the theories or concepts that crossed my mind when conducting the interviews. In this theoretical note I found the social identity theory, which indeed seemed to work. So although the older employees in this study want organizations to make adaptations in the workplace to accommodate their needs or wishes, they should be provided to everyone in order to avoid that it would be perceived as a stamp that they

belong to a devalued social group. Secondly, it was explained that some interviewees perceived HR practices, like practices related to recognition and respect, but that they were provided in a way that did not reflect a real caring attitude or interest in the needs of individual employees. It was provided in a stand-alone way, as something easy to give without really wanting to get involved what the organization could do to improve the workplace so that older employees would extend their working lives. Here again, I had to go back to the research diary in order to see how each interview went. Sometimes I had to probe a lot, and those aspects of the conversation were written down here. The conversation below gives an example:

Researcher: Could you tell me something about your perception of recognition and respect?

Interviewee: Yes, well, they show some respect I think, and recognition

Researcher: Hmm hmm... (pause)

Interviewee: Well, maybe not actually, I mean, they do give some financial incentives to show that they appreciate you, but nothing more than that

Researcher: How do you mean?

Interviewee: It's not real you see, they don't REALLY care, it's a bit fake, empty.

Researcher: Can you give me an example?

Interviewee: Of course, they might ask me how I'm doing but they don't care about my answer, it's just the form, the real caring attitude, the interest in someone and as such the motivation to really do something for someone is missing.

Researcher: Hmm

Interviewee: So recognition and respect, no, not REALLY.

The above example shows the use of hermeneutics and the different steps that I had to take to grasp the contradictions and the complexity of the issues.

Appendix 12: Cronbach's alpha's

Below the output of SPSS is depicted. The different scales are given: flexible work options, job design, training, performance evaluation, recognition and respect, affective organizational commitment, continuance organizational and job performance.

Flexible work options

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations

		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité

Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,840	3

Job design

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations

		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité

Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,799	4

Training

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations

		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité

Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,902	4

Performance Evaluation

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations

		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité

Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,889	3

Recognition & Respect

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations

		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité

Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,889	3

Affective Organizational Commitment

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations			
		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité	
Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,909	6

Continuance Organizational Commitment

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations			
		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité	
Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,793	4

Job performance

Récapitulatif de traitement des observations

		N	%
Observations	Valide	414	100,0
	Exclus ^a	0	,0
	Total	414	100,0

a. Suppression par liste basée sur toutes les variables de la procédure.

Statistiques de fiabilité

Alpha de Cronbach	Nombre d'éléments
,734	3